

YODOGIMA
IN FEUDALISTIC JAPAN

I. WILLIAM ADAMS

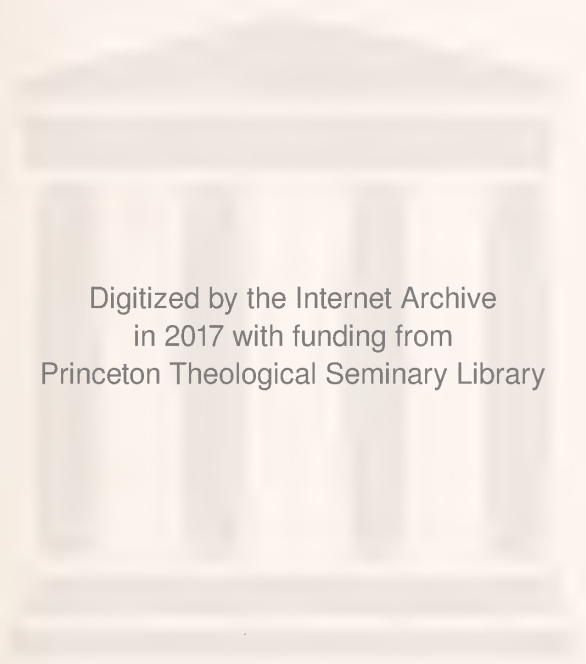
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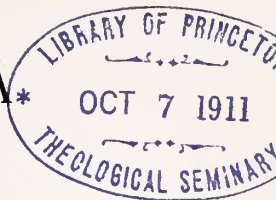
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IN FEUDALISTIC JAPAN

BY ✓

I. WILLIAM ADAMS

AUTHOR OF

SHIBUSAWA, THE PASSING OF OLD JAPAN, ETC.



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YODOGIMA

CHAPTER I

JAPAN lay sweltering with uncertainty. Four centuries of unbridled warfare had reduced her once sturdy, centralized government to little more than a revered impotency; the country had become the property or the booty of its daimyos — those knights-errant, the pride of a nation.

It was an age of military prowess, of unlicensed chivalry, and to the victor belonged the spoils — till wrested from him, by another more powerful or less nice about the taking.

Shibata, grizzled and fair, sat upon the veranda, looking out, over the ramparts, across the moats, along the busied streets, to the mellowed hillsides beyond. It was all his: gained by life's devoted, loyal service, not to self, but to a chosen, rising superior. It had now come time for him to assert his own supremacy; the lord he served had met his doom, gone the self same way that ambition for ages had decreed — lay shrouded in state, with his good rich blood dripping cold at the dagger's point.

"Nobunaga conceived well," mused he, half aloud, the tears fast welling in his great dark eyes, "but

Shibata, his oldest captain, alone shall finish what the master undertook — Japan must be subdued.”

The skies darkened and the land-tempered breeze calmed, as the big lord rested back upon the soft-matted floor, gazing now afar over the hill tops toward the starry vaulted space in the distance. A little maiden, tender and eager, with black eyes and darker, massive hair, stealing near, sat at his side.

Perhaps she, too, dreamed of the future, for she had learned to love.

Learned to love as the Taira maidens, her ancestors, of a half thousand years ago, had not attempted to do. The deeds of daring and flights of fancy through all those tumultuous centuries had not only given to man the privileges of individuality, but wrested woman from the thralldom of the ages and secured to her a place and choice worthy her being.

Once again she might love and be loved — though the father's command, the shogun's decree, or the mikado's will stood over her, in fact, as law, and at heart, both materially and spiritually.

Shibata did not at once turn to her, nor did he take his eyes from the vision conjured within. Conscious of her presence, the very thought burned and seared deeper and firmer his ready-made if rigorous anticipations. Fortune had given him a child in whom the blood of Taira made possible the connection. His own efforts had carved out a place and privilege. Their chieftain's death afforded the opportunity. By

the sacrifice of a child he himself would gain the shogun's favor.

"Yodogima?" commanded he, after a while.

"Yes, father."

"What were you just now thinking about?"

"Amida, most honorable father."

"Your own, or some other fair one's goddess of mercy; you are so considerate, my daughter?"

"Mine, dear father," replied she, without any change of expression or an apparent heart-beat.

"Humph!" ejaculated Shibata, thoughtfully; "it is strange how affinities get mixed; I myself possessed somewhat a consciousness—of Amaterasu, though, the goddess of love. I wonder what is the time; the hour must draw nigh: the barons will soon be gathering; it is really getting dark. You may retire now, to make ready; Katsutoya shall be present, and your maid must grow impatient—though, I promise, nature has left really little to be done, and you need not blush; a father is privileged, you know."

In the great hall, at another side of the high-walled inclosure—with its ponderous gate and turreted angles, surrounding a network of tile-covered, wood-lacquered buildings or grained-post colonnades, with here and there a shrine or a bell or a row of lanterns or a fretwork of gold—sat Sakuma and Gonroku, the one Shibata's chief captain and the other his natural son.

Sakuma had just returned with added laurels; a new fief or more had been wrested from Uesugi (to

the eastward) his master's old-time foe and a daimyo of undoubted rank. To beat him in battle was no mean feat, and this, Sakuma's latest triumph, had once more demonstrated the power and efficiency of Kitanoshi, Shibata's stronghold, in whose castle all the great barons formerly subject to Nobunaga were then about to assemble. Shibata, the lord daimyo of all Echizen, had issued the invitations, ostensibly to cement friendships and perpetuate in authority the house of their late master, Nobunaga. Gonroku, too, felt the force of his father's growing ascendancy, but may have been just now a little jealous; duties elsewhere, to the westward, escorting Katsutoya to Nagahama castle — lately surrendered to them by Hideyoshi — had disappointed and kept him personally from the latest battle field.

The perfume of azaelia freshened the room; lanterns suspended everywhere cast a subdued light into the farthest corners; soft, velvety matting set in oblongs edged round with black-lacquered frames covered the floor and a huge vase of old Satsuma ware, with a single scroll hung at the back, constituted the only decoration. Sakuma and Gonroku had come in early, and seating themselves at one side spoke in low anxious tones or whacked cautiously their pipes, as convenience required, against the one hibachi (brazier) shared between them.

“You did nobly, Sakuma: my father's house owes much to your abilities.”

Sakuma's eyes sparkled, but the daring, impulsive

soldier, middle-aged and aggressive, made no answer. He knew this Gonroku: knew him to be a chip off the block he had served well and truly: had come to regard their praise and assurance at its true worth. Yodogima's words would have pleased him more; she inherited well her mother's traits. The Taira stock had taken deep root in the princess, and above all else Sakuma worshipped at this ancient particular shrine. Then, again, she had advised him somewhat of her wishes — without at all disclosing any motive, though he may have guessed as much — and he had sworn in secrecy to do her service at the cost of death; be that his own, or his master's, or his lordship's good and faithful son's.

“It is less than I would do, were Shibata my age,” replied Sakuma, after a little, striking his metal pipe harder than was polite against the resonant hibachi.

“Father is rather old, and a bit fidgety; but Gonroku is young and in good favors: pray don't overlook that.”

“But you forget Katsutoya. I must confess that I thought better of — our lord's age than his placing at Nagahama, in the front, between Kitanoshi and Kyoto, the capital, that — fellow, only an adopted son, even though he carry the shogun's blood — poor stuff, in these days — a thing any true knight might fairly doubt.”

“Sh — h — h. Not above a whisper, my good Sakuma.”

“Why so? These walls have no ears, I promise.”

"But Hideyoshi has. They say his spies are everywhere, and anywhere; and some — I told you so; there comes Junkei, now."

"He's an ass — frivolous, foolish, and a mask: a counterpart of the monkey-faced Hideyoshi himself. I shall not rise — what say you, Gonroku?"

"Flout him; I take it his superior shall fare no better at the hands of the daimyos."

Junkei pranced in, to the center of the hall, and without pretending to see anybody, much less their host's two worthy attendants, turned upon his heel, shouting:

"Behold; the Great; a Hideyoshi approaches!"

No sooner had the echo died than Hideyoshi, the but recently created daimyo of Omi; self-intended master of Nobunaga's leavings and loudly proclaimed projector of the peace; with the commonest kind of low down blood in his veins, and the largest aspirations in his mind; weasen-faced, small, stooped, bullet-eyed and fiercely aggressive, yet plausibly reserved, angled his way in, displaced his long-sword, handed it to his own attendant, Junkei — who, himself, hung it upon the wall — and squatting in the middle of the hall, at one end — where only the host should sit — called loudly for a hibachi and attendance.

Hearing the noise and discerning the occasion, their host entered, followed by Ikeda, daimyo of Settsu: Niwa, of Wakasa; Maeda; Takigawa, and other invited guests, with their attendants, including Kuroda and Takiyama, noted captains under Hide-

yoshi, who had the decency, if not purpose, to comply with established etiquette and recognized custom.

Shibata belonged to the old school, the bakufu, acknowledged only the bushida (code of chivalry), and when those daimyos observed Hideyoshi, an upstart and outsider, self-made and wilful, usurping their host's privileged place and rank, feelings something akin to shame if not resentment possessed them, one and all alike.

"Yes, gentlemen; I am here," grinned Hideyoshi, rubbing his hands and peering among them — without deigning to arise — "ready for business. Our lord, Nobunaga, good and great, as he was, is dead. The work, though, which he began, must be carried on. It behooves us, his once trusted followers, to get together. Come close up, round Hideyoshi; who, perchance, feels the loss more keenly than any other. Shibata, my old friend and good fellow, bring in the sake (wine). We barons need cheer, and Hideyoshi in particular —"

"Intends to shampoo lord Shibata. That is why he so audaciously usurps his place," interposed Sakuma, coming threateningly up.

"Well said, Sakuma; I remember his doing so, once before. It is, though, a long time now —. How do you, Hideyoshi? Is your hand steady, and capable? now that you are a daimyo? like others of us? with less face? however?" remarked Shibata, tauntingly.

A low twitter and ready gabble ensued. Only

Kuroda and Takiyama remained serious or composed. Junkei danced about, unconscious of any wrong, till Hideyoshi spoke :

“Compose yourself, Junkei. Did not the queen Shomu once attend a beggar? Why should not Hideyoshi shampoo Shibata? His hand is yet true, and the heart pure. Come Shibata : prepare yourself. Hideyoshi shall again serve his oldest friend.”

Such complacency in the face of so mean a taunt fairly unnerved Hideyoshi's bitterest enemies, and at least some of Shibata's less staunch supporters really felt that such a man — one who could so govern his temper and conserve his patience — must of necessity be the greater man.

Hideyoshi began the shampooing as if wont to do a real service, and Shibata to hide his only too patent chagrin and sorrow at such defeat pretended to sleep.

“It is only the friendship between us here assembled that restrains our enemies scattered everywhere around. If by surrendering Nagahama to Shibata I have strengthened : if by shampooing him I have cemented that bond, then Hideyoshi has done a good service — perhaps the end, if not the method, shall be deemed worthy, if not befitting.”

So saying, Hideyoshi left off further effort at conciliation, and withdrawing proceeded thence, toward Kyoto, with a visible escort of only some three hundred men.

Sakuma would have followed, possibly to no small

purpose, but there was one present, a small baron, hitherto unnoticed, who saw farther than Shibata divined. Iyeyasu, a prince from Mikawa, advised that Hideyoshi be allowed to go his way unmolested.

CHAPTER II

KATSUTOYA, in whom Shibata was personally most deeply interested, had not put in an appearance: yet no pressing duties at Nagahama or elsewhere could possibly have kept him away.

Though of no particular consequence, this young prince was generally conceded to be the clandestine son of Yoshiaki, the then *de jure* shogun, who had been, a number of years theretofore, deposed and exiled by Nobunaga, as was customary, to one of the many monasteries in the hills of Hiyeyisan to the rear of Kyoto. Shibata, Nobunaga's chief captain, no doubt with an eye to the future, had early taken in the friendless youth and by adopting him as a son — with the rank and title of a captain — had given him respectable standing: perhaps intending him to be the possible means of later on obtaining a commission from the shogun, himself; thus legalizing his warfare against his neighbors — a thing every daimyo of consequence aspired above all else.

Shibata, chafed at Katsutoya's omission or disobedience and Hideyoshi's keen eye, readily discerned the possibilities of so potent a failure.

“Junkei?” commanded he, as he and his train approached, on the way to Kyoto, the recently surrendered castle of Nagahama.

"Yes, my lord."

"Tell Takiyama Hideyoshi would pay Katsutoya a visit, en route."

"What!"

"Fool! Control yourself; do as bid; and with a good face."

"But Katsutoya is an enemy's favorite, and we have only a small guard."

"Hence worth our while; and do you comprehend? Cease conjecturing; Hideyoshi knows. Nobunaga is dead: Yodogima, mine."

They three met in council at the narrow pass leading to Katsutoya's new charge. It was dark, and Takiyama conjured new dangers. Hideyoshi bade him disarm and lead the way.

"It is madness," whispered Takiyama, more thoughtful of himself than of his duty.

"You, a Christian, would bear arms, visiting upon a neighbor? Is that your religion?"

Takiyama faltered, and Hideyoshi proceeded. His own sword had not been cast aside; courtesy forbade it; but upon their arrival and presentation the fearless daimyo of the new school unsheathed his master weapon and reversing it tendered the hilt to Katsutoya; who was so bewildered with respect for his visitor's confidence that no time was lost in the forming of a friendship that for once set a new example and again sent Hideyoshi on his way the wiser for his daring.

Hideyoshi had gained an important advantage by

a newly tried agency, diplomacy — a thing his compeers, and even Nobunaga his superior, had deigned despise. Triumphant at Kitanoshi and successful in Nagahama, a double prize at stake and a soldier like Kuroda to enforce the decree, why not proclaim himself at once?

Nobunaga's corpse lie in state at the capital, and who were there to dispute Hideyoshi, now that Shibata remained absent, nursing the vexations of sore defeat?

“Junkei?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Call Kuroda.”

“I think he sleeps; you know, we just arrived — it is only a trice since we left — and Kyoto is miles distant—”

“Babbler! Does Hideyoshi sleep? Bring Kuroda, before your neck and my simiter have tried their want.”

“Kuroda, are you Hideyoshi's captain?” asked Hideyoshi, presently.

“Yes, most honorable master.”

“Then why sleep?”

“It is nature's call.”

“Away with nature; the gods are omnipotent. Would you, Kuroda, serve less? No? Then listen. Hideyoshi defies both God and man. Marshal your troops. I proclaim myself.”

“They sleep.”

“Give them gold, and they shall awaken.”

“But how use them — my instructions — I have nothing —”

“What? Kuroda, my captain, a beggar? Have I not confidence in you? A better age dawns.”

“Command me.”

“That is more like it. Listen. Nobunaga lies unburied. Let all Japan witness the ceremony. The gods proclaim their precedence; Hideyoshi shall do reverence first: then the barons, widows, and pretenders may wrangle out their proper rank.”

“But our ancestors?”

“Bosh! With Kuroda and Shintoism on the one hand and Takiyama and Christianity on the other, Hideyoshi shall wrought anew. Reverence might better rot; manhood waxes original.”

The shogun forthwith appointed Hideyoshi major general of all the mikado's forces — gold had brought him, too, from his hiding: a ready request afforded the occasion — and all the daimyos were commanded to appear and do homage. The wealth and the fashion of the nation were invited. The whole populace was instructed to come. Such a gathering, and so bold a venture, marked a new era. All the best and the most vigorous, the intellectual and the ambitious, the strong and the brave, rallied to the call of a thirsty leader, chose to lay their lives at the altar of endeavor, and to grapple for the first time with an individualism that bade fair to spring from the very roots of society, and to thrive — only one man stood silently but resolutely in the way.

Shibata responded to the call, and all the daimyos recently subservient to the dead chief were there. Others came in person, or sent suitable representatives; the common people under Hideyoshi's immediate sway rallied in numbers; samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants alike responded: such a gathering of wealth and power, rags and poverty, never before had assembled to do reverence.

Daitokige temple had been designated by Hideyoshi as the most suitable place for the ceremonies and workmen rendered it into a veritable dreamland. Flowers and bunting and gold and purple contrasted significantly with the white gowns and mourning hoods worn by the rich and the poor alike.

Shibata and his suite had been purposely assigned to the place of honor. Nowhere were Hideyoshi and his followers to be seen—they had apparently vanished as if of the past or in the spirit world, along with Nobunaga, their fallen chief. Yodogima sat in the center, surrounded by her maids and friends, with their costumes of white or regalias of gold, banked against a background of wealth and refinement. Far up the hillsides and all round in front and to the rear, sat or trod, mingled and stared, solid masses of straggling groups of knighted chevaliers or gaping underlings, fair maidens and rosy-cheeked damsels. Presently the huge gong sounded and everybody there bowed reverently: the bonzes (priests), kneeling round the sepulchre said their prayers, and

Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity alike awaited God, conjured a Spirit, bade the Overman speak.

Hideyoshi, with the infant heir, Samboshi, Nobunaga's grandson, in his arms, stood forth; whence, no one knew. A voice, amid silence, read from the tomb the order of the day.

Calmly facing the shrine and beckoning the multitude, Hideyoshi then spoke:

"I, Hideyoshi, protector of the throne and conservator of the peace, command that you and each of you, loyal subjects, give heed unto Nobunaga's will; here and thence to you voiced by the good and great Yamato-Dake (god of war). Let be what I proclaim."

Thereat two white falcons spread their wings and flapped away into space. A loud roar and din as of horses trampling and speeding issued from the temple. Armed guards sprang forward everywhere — out of the temples, behind the gates, into the streets, around the palace, amid the hills — and Kuroda stood ready to strike down the lowliest and the highest who dared raise a hand or voice.

Shibata slunk back, and amid the confusion an old woman seemingly, clad in black with drawn hood, carrying a strange bundle, whispered in Yodogima's ear. In a twinkling the knowing princess had donned the disguise and with no other apparent escort made her way toward Kitanoshi, safely tucked away behind the mountain range in the distance.

CHAPTER III

THE day dawned bright, and all Kitanoshi livened with anticipation. Great masses of foliage bended or thirsted under the golden dew drops that trickled and glistened in the creeping sun's modest warmth. Everywhere men and women, clad in comfort or donning their due, wafting song-words or grumbling at fate, busied themselves with that beginning which marks the endless round of time's eternal quest and God's immutable law. Little had been left to the wild, for here the untrained had long ago found his tenatless haven; the ox and the fragile alike had surrendered to the call of higher being; here, where the human over-lords the beast, man went his way: marveled only at the beauties of God-striven energy.

Shibata eagerly tripped again into the council chamber; years of earnestness sat lightly upon his shoulders; Takigawa of Ise was there to meet him; both had suffered intolerable insult at Hideyoshi's ruthless assumption of authority, and now that others more vain or less discerning sought shelter under their own disconsolate roofs these two, more subtle, if less capable, would consolidate forces and move upon what they none too soon conceived to be a common necessity.

Iyeyasu arose later; life to him seemed the better

conserved in leisure; and while Shibata, his host, and Takigawa, his neighbor, wrangled the exigencies of war, or planned doubtful expedencies, a more inviting, though perhaps no less urgent prospect lolled and soothed the gallant young daimyo into more than a customary morning's peaceful dreaming of love's over-powering, life-building virtue.

"Yodogima, my Yodogima," whispered he, as the great red sun arose and cast its fiery rays into the opened room around him.

"You are mine, for Amaterasu, the good sun goddess, reveals you, sweet Yodogima, in every trace of her lovely countenance. Come closer, oh, my darling; come closer, that Iyeyasu may feel, may know, may live the divine. You are my savior, earth's true progenitor, and the stars in heaven reveal but your eternity. O, Amaterasu; O, Jimmu; O, Yodogima — my Light, my Purpose, my God."

The waterfall in the distance murmured its time-honored song of powers subdued. The pine, dwarfed into miniature proportions, revealed the potency of patience rigidly enforced. Nodding stones here and there symbolized again and anon the power of truth. A half-hidden lakelet in the distance conjured a magnitude there impossible, and from the castle crag in the garden's center, receding round to the dim horizon beyond, no thing remained untouched or thought neglected in the making of this a place not alone inhabitable but as well inviting.

A lone lespedeza straggled and bloomed signifi-

cantly close at the wall side ; where, perhaps, ages ago its fair protégé long since a goddess had met and won with no more grace a far less gallant lover. Would Yodogima come there too?

Iyeyasu breathed contentedly of its fragrance and willed afresh that herein lie the potency of man's everlasting generation.

A cuckoo came and cocked itself upon the side house-sill.

"Sing to me," commanded Iyeyasu, bending forward intently.

The cuckoo stood stark still, amazed at the sound of his voice. Some ominous thing — too uncanny for thought, more than consciousness would reveal — presently suggested, "I'll kill the cuckoo if he does not sing."

"No, no ; not I — only Nobunaga could say that. Iyeyasu —"

"Sing to me," demanded he this time, straightening up defiantly.

The bird ruffled its plumage, as if ready to fly or do battle, and conscience bade him, "I'll make the cuckoo sing."

Ah ! That sounds like Hideyoshi. Those are his sentiments. Iyeyasu —"

"Sing to me," said he now, leaning back adroitly.

The little thing tucked its wings, and closing one eye stood confidingly in the warm sun's rays. Iyeyasu — only said :

"I'll wait till the cuckoo sings."

And he did wait—but presently his eyes were opened by the sound of a voice that arose not from nature, nor from the ethereal, for his own consciousness revealed it, and all the senses rose and the soul stooped to a common level. Iyeyasu, the one prince who had resisted every temptation to yield at the call of devotion; who had withstood the force of power, ignored the claims of conquest, and shunned at the taste of wealth; who had succeeded to opportunity, yet studied its consequence; had held his own against, without intruding upon others; partaken of the fruits of life and looked forward into the indeterminate beyond—had welcomed any test that man or God invoked, now stood dazed at the charm of woman's potency.

He looked up, and the same green vine still carried its own true offering, the cuckoo had long flown, the sun rose and the earth responded, but underneath it all, above the rest, and whence he knew not, came the call that for good or for bad, at once and for all, too soon or too late, moved him to do and to know.

"Come to me," cried he, thrilled with the notes that issued, loftier than the cuckoo's, more heavenly than are the skies.

"Come to me," repeated he, yet composedly, "for it is you, Yodogima; none other could sing so sweetly. I must have you."

Still the tanka (verse) issued, its soul-stirring message only tightened the grip of one human heart upon another. For ages these gentle maidens and their

ardent suitors had dwelt upon its perfection. No base word had been left to mar its symmetry; not a thought of mortality jarred the sense; the unreal had been made real; yet hitherto in his mind no voice had risen to essay its value.

Iyeyasu listened and Yodogima rendered; sang as if possessed of a spirit never before felt or touched, and Iyeyasu hurled at constancy's feet all that tradition or enlightenment had vainly invoked.

A power unseen, unfelt, unknown, held supreme. The best that the energies of men had yet devised stood symbolized in this one man Iyeyasu — nobody disputed that: not even he himself at heart could deny the truth. The exigencies of birth, the value of training, and the force of purpose alike marked this man as a leader among men. A full consciousness of the responsibilities urged him unequivocally to the fulfillment of his mission. He would do for his kind no less than the gods had done for theirs.

But here, confronting him, arose, commanding attention, a new authority.

Heretofore men and women had been considered one — man. Were it possible, after all, that they, too, were separated by a gulf as wide as that between heaven and earth? A destiny as incomprehensible as nirvana itself? A province as distinct as that revealed by the principles positive and negative? And did God but stand between and the devil behind them? Was it the devil between and the gods behind? Or

were the gods beckoning them alone, and unhindered except by man himself?

These were stirring questions for Iyeyasu, who had conceived Shinto, then suffered Buddha, at last to become threatened of Christ.

Thought crowded upon him till his head seemed in a whirl and only the body responded — to what he did not know; no lone man could tell.

Yodogima sat upon the lacquered bench, underneath the spreading lespedeza, innocent of a thought beyond the duty to which she, the eldest daughter of the host and betrothed of a superior, Katsutoya, had been assigned. Her place in the household made it incumbent upon her to entertain at this hour of the day a guest and patron of the rank and standing of Iyeyasu.

The flowers overhead bespoke her innocence; the verse she sang portrayed a devotion unquestioned; while the dressing of her hair, the manner of her garments, and the method of her doing signified an age, station and disposition not to be mistaken.

Yet the pathos and the inspiration of her voice revealed an inner consciousness that is neither bought of preferment nor satisfied with precedent. The plaintive mournful notes, the anxious eager accents, the glad forgiving tones, all invited repose, stirred the interest and awakened impulse. Iyeyasu conjured within his over-burdened conscience a duty consistent alike with inner compulsion and outward exigencies. He would surrender position, opportunity, everything

to save his manhood: the very soul of being called aloud from the uttermost depths of unreality — the real paled with insignificance, the things around him shrivelled into nothingness, the earth itself rocked upon an uncertain axis, and the heavens alone bade him do.

He would have cried out, but words seemed a mockery; gathered her in his arms, had it not been vulgar; touched her with his lips, were not the flesh a repulsive thing; entranced her with a look, coaxed her with promises, inveigled her with deception, stolen her, coerced her, done anything to get her — but the tenents of his religion forbade.

Numberless generations of denial had made of him a man. All the instincts of brute being stood lost behind the ages of progressive enlightenment. The tutelage of an ancestry that fancy painted looking down with each star twinkle, that science tore from the hard face of phenomenon, that existence itself proclaimed with every heart-beat, guided this man and this woman toward an only rational attainment, to a predestined, uncontrollable end.

Man in his weakness had thought differently — no age had brought forth more than conformity, here or elsewhere on earth; history, travel, and science had proven that, and these men and women were not devoid of understanding — had conceived the earth as of heaven, conjured their state to be coexistent with the earth, and made man at once a master and

its slave: woman had become the handmaid of fortune, the instrument of fate, and the idol of the gods.

Iyeyasu pondered, and Yodogima wrought.

Clothed in garments that obliterated all trace of form or suggestion, of a texture that hid the weave and a making that disclosed no stitch, yet displayed a handiwork as perfect as it was simple; her hair waved and fastened round without an ornament or a device that could be seen; her feet sandalled in earthen-like wood, and her nails pink and cheeks olive and eyes trustful, Yodogima revealed in her presence and strove with a purpose all that time had been able to wrest from an humbler beginning. The green turf, the broken sky line, birds of plumage and the fragrance of flowers, the open expanse or covered nook, all bespoke a care and a concern intended to move and to weld mankind.

Yodogima remained seated, underneath the shade, amid an environment made, not creative. The sun drove its rays fiercer and more propellingly against Iyeyasu's stand. It remained for him to give; she could but receive. Love beamed from every distance, floated in close upon them, arose subtly within, grew hard without, compelling, exacting, and vital. Iyeyasu strode down the chiselled steps—overcome with the joy of doing, forgetful of every mandate in restraint—and falling upon his knees before her, whispered:

“Yodogima, I love you.”

Her song only quickened, then lowered a little, per-

haps the least bit pathetically.

There was neither exultation nor regret, though for the moment a faint realization of duty — arising from a constantly receding past, battling against an urgently progressive present — flushed apparently, then whitened perceptibly her face: she sang more sweetly, if less deeply, than before.

Iyeyasu's eyes fell to the pebbled floor and his soul scared with anticipation.

Would she bid defiance away, under the stress of heart? Or would she starve self, to uphold tradition? The tanka progressed, and Iyeyasu trembled underneath advancement's harsher demands; time had wrought his inevitable change. Ages ago his nearest ancestors had snatched the coveted morsel and gorged unchallenged behind a fiercer defy. Yet still farther back and over that again stood Amaterasu, benign, supreme, unquestioned. Whence this fleeting thought of man? Were he but the crude remnant of an unbroken descent thence the God of gods? Man, only a product of decline, groping his way from past to present; often recovering, then again but losing; only to sink still lower, more hopelessly, till dust once and forever claimed him? Were hell his goal, or heaven his due? The tanka alone answered.

Her notes quickened, and it strengthened him: there remained but a single verse, and it seemed as if breathing were a penalty.

Sakuma passed them by, at some distance, in the garden below. The concerned captain had just left

the council chamber, and walking as if in a hurry, toward the armory, not far distant, underneath the inner ramparts, at the farther side of the castle enclosure, without observing the lovers, well hidden behind the overhanging vine's long drooping branches — they were as unmindful of him as he was careless about them — Sakuma only heard, though marvelled its more than usual pathos the last informing strains of Yodogima's world-appealing message.

Knowing though who her auditor might be and divining the occasion for such feeling — only the last measures had reached him distinctly — there appeared no need for any closer contact: the grizzled veteran went his way, determined, however convinced.

Yodogima and Iyeyasu both had risen, and standing facing, each bowed earnestly, meditating deeply the responsibilities they had then for all time of their own will so freely assumed.

“Pardon me, Iyeyasu; I did not mean to be irreverent. Some ungovernable impulse truly possessed me — relieve and forget.”

“Forget I could not, and why relieve? Is it not meet to take?”

“You know my father's will.”

“And I know yours.”

“And your own?”

“Yes.”

“You disadvantage me.”

“I'll prove it's not a quandary.”

“Then I am yours, for I have confidence in you, and

confidence rightfully bestowed is truly real liberty won."

"Quite democratic, Yodogima, and — perchance justly so; were men without some wholesome check the world should sooner reach its final doom."

"But we live, Iyeyasu, and — is not life worth the while? Does it not portend something more than merely living?"

"It would were it not for the price — but trust me, Yodogima; I live only for you."

"I do."

"Then you are mine, and the world can take care of itself."

They bowed low, and Iyeyasu, strengthened, as only a wholesome appreciation can strengthen, took his leave, fully determined to remove every obstacle to the consummation of a love that had grown and ripened from childhood associations, that germinated with an earliest contact and sent its roots deep down into the fertile soil of a consciously overpowering affinity.

Yodogima stood still at first, fairly puzzled at the daring of Iyeyasu's conception.

All that time or task had taught her seemed crushed underneath a possible truth. Were man but a stretch between something and nothingness, then generation must be a curse and love only a consequence. And if it were not true and marriage were a thing in which a parent, the state, or society at large rightly had an

interest, then her answer had been a crime; she had transgressed, and therein must lie the sin.

Then she remembered that the sages had sung in all lands and at all times of man's strength and woman's worse than weakness.

"I will trust him and he shall prove the truth."

Yodogima ran out of the bowery and into the open: Iyeyasu turned, the sun reflected its rays, and in that parting look, only a tender glance, a message from thence, she beheld her God.

Iyeyasu hurried on, toward his mission; the noise at the armory, Shibata's high purpose, and his own inner determination bade him act quickly and knowingly were he to save Yodogima — he did not apprehend Sakuma; Iyeyasu was only human; other exigencies than his there were in more directions than one.

Now that her lover had gone, removed himself beyond the fetch or force of feeling, Yodogima, too, at once realized with all the ableness of intellect at her command — strengthened and driven by a will as heartless as it was unremitting — a duty that till then had lain dormant under the influence of a controlling if perhaps inexcusable situation. Not that she pondered the course that he would pursue, no more the virtue of their undertaking; it were for him to determine successfulness: God alone might judge them true or false — but her father, the one who had given her place and opportunity, who had conceived differently, was at that very moment embarking upon

enterprises and assuming responsibilities wholly dependent upon her.

And one false step, a single controverted thought, must necessarily lead to his uncertain downfall — his death had been a small thing, her own a welcome sacrifice, but the bushida! Hell itself were a blessing as compared with everlasting disgrace.

The blood fairly froze in her veins, thought refused obeisance, fain spirit paled at the consequence, and only duty urged her now; she must speak, she would save him, she should uphold tradition, even at the cost of self.

“Father,” begged she, accosting him at the threshold of his abandoned chamber, his friend, Takigawa, supporting him vainly, close at one side.

“Yes, daughter.”

“Please return into the house; I should like to speak with you.”

“What? A daughter thrust herself into a father’s affairs? Did you hear that, Takigawa?”

“It’s like a woman: I can retire, and let her have her say, if only for once; it can do no harm, Shibata.”

“Not so, Takigawa. Wives pleading, daughters interfering, and everybody for himself, these days — I tell you Hideyoshi is the curse of this land. On with the business, and when Shibata has laid low the last of them, stood right above might and attained his rightful place, then Katsutoya may rule and Yodogima can speak — consolation is a husband’s due, obedience a parent’s command.”

“Honorable father —”

“Tut, tut; Shibata’s child knows not irreverence. See her, my lord? Ha, ha; how gracefully she falls! An angel could not look sweeter, there is no better plaything—let us be off, Takigawa, lest we disturb her and miss the enemy; it is a long way to Shizugataka.”

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTLY the hillsides, far out over the noised-up city, rang with the bustle and cry of "To arms". No patriot there, not a samurai's mother, but thrilled with the joy and strengthened at the bidding of higher endeavor.

Only the mean, the weak, and the unpatriotic would question expediency; small men with little souls might buy to sell again; others of brawn, their minds a mirage, fashion the wares, drones and idlers drive and shout their wives and children to plant and draw — men and women, humans with a purpose and a promise higher and nobler than grubbing for food or hackling for exchange or bartering for gold served a usefulness, encouraged a hope, and pointed the way toward that rendering which make men large; the ideal portended a reality which bid them not, ever, stoop to sordid, useless gain.

The lines formed, and no more pleasing scene had come down through time or fancy; men with hardened muscle and bronzed arms, their eyes sparkling and step quickened, with spears levelled and cutlasses buckled on, tramped to time and listened with intent.

"Open the gates, and down with the bridge," shouted the captain, as a hundred thousand brave troops turned their backs upon peace and stores to

face the exigencies of uncertain warfare — an underling's last sad gasp at fate and the godly's only reach to greatness.

War — the one thing that makes man better than his neighbor, bridges the chasm between life and death, raises a hope superior within. War — the slogan of nature, and the handmaid of creation. War — the savior of mankind, at the cost of brute, stirred them as it had their fathers to superhuman, transcendent energy.

They marched past the shops — in which sycophants wrangled this and that; through the woods where cutters and hewers sweat or chewed; over the plains, amid sustenance born of fain indifference — into the mountains, lofty, grand and inspiring.

The roads ran smooth and easy up the long sloping ascent, they were builded and used, for a like purpose, long before Shibata's rise had conjured sublimity's ultimate pass. Presently sounds beyond echoed again the uncertainties of dame progress. The dizzy heights scaled measured accurately the cost of further effort. Ominous clouds darkened the way. Shibata at last lagged, and a fox leaped from the roadside.

"Gonroku! Gonroku!" whispered Shibata, springing from his chair and peering into darkness.

"Yes, father," replied the son, a little surprised, but not altogether unconvinced.

"The enemy! Cannot you see them? They come in columns touching the seas: ranks receding — I can-

not number them — reaching beyond the horizon. Katsutoya leads them.”

“Impossible,” shouted Sakuma. “On with the march.”

“Listen,” whispered Shibata, now white in the face and unsteady of foot.

“They do mock Sakuma,” ventured Gonroku, before the first echo had again resounded upon the still resonant air.

“Listen,” repeated Shibata, his eyes like fireballs in the dark.

“A thousand answers,” said Gonroku; now, too, almost convinced.

“You see phantoms, and Sakuma hearkens not to goblins. Old women and, I believe, some men still read disaster into the appearance of a fox — dogs, badgers, lizards, etc. If Katsutoya really be at Shizugataka, it is high time that we arrest him. And if Hideyoshi has been so reckless as to risk a host in one defense, so much the better for Shibata; the way shall have been cleared to Kyoto with a single stroke and — if I mistake not, Kyoto without Katsutoya would be quite as acceptable at least to a part of Kitanoshi as it should be with hi — a phantom.”

“What means Sakuma, father?” inquired the son, perchance more intelligently than judiciously.

“Let him take his own proper command, and himself prove that prophecy is not blasphemy — by sending up, to this, a secure place, for you and me, the head of this ‘phantom,’ as he calls it.”

“Good,” responded Sakuma — and division again strengthened Hideyoshi’s position.

With calling at Nagahama, Hideyoshi had made easy the plan of turning an enemy’s ready contingent into a no less effective than willing instrument.

Katsutoya had never loved Yodogima, and out of promotion had conceived the idea also that Shibata, his benefactor’s purpose, were a hindrance rather than a help to his vainly imagined restoration. Further, this particular young princess, according to his nicely wrought notions, did not at all augur the fulfillment of an Ashikaga shogun’s well-reputed requirements — and Katsutoya’s dreams were already resplendent with all that had made his supposed ancestors of some three hundred years tolerable if not respectable.

“The bargain is a just one, Hideyoshi,” promised he, contemplatively. “Shibata’s daughter would serve better the necessities of a daimyo like yourself — Katsutoya shall have more the need of an humbler service; take her and welcome; but why risk my neck at the front? If you would serve me as shogun then secure me a man.”

“Just so. And nothing is safer or saner or sounder than self-made security — go against this man Sakuma; the rest are only women, fit to gobble.”

“Then it is gobble, gobble, and Shizugataka for me.”

“Perhaps. You know, though, that Hideyoshi is reputed, there.”

Katsutoya led his troops to the defense of Shizu-

gataka, Hideyoshi's outlying stronghold against Shibata's well-worn approach; but no sooner had camp been struck than Sakuma hurled Shibata's advance force against him. The battle raged, and Katsutoya wavered; surprise had overcome him, and defeat completed the rout. Sakuma would have followed up his success and gained Yodogima the head. Not the hand, of Katsutoya had not Gonroku hailed him in the distance; Shibata had again seen the fox — saw Hideyoshi's phalanx scaling the mountains to the left — and sent Gonroku to recall Sakuma that he might make haste to save Kitanoshi itself.

"O Jimmu; O Katsutoya; O Yodogima," murmured Shibata, as Gonroku disappeared down the mountain side.

A forced march soon brought Gonroku's reserves within knowing distance of Sakuma's victorious division.

Katsutoya had recovered himself on the opposite side of Yodo lake. Sakuma grew impatient to take him, but Gonroku fired at the thought of a hireling's success and balked at the proposal, denying even the identity of their enemy.

"It is Katsutoya, I tell you, and unless destroyed our very lives are in danger."

"You err, Sakuma; and till you prove me wrong you shall command no more than a body guard."

With only six men, seven including himself, Sakuma plunged through the reeds, once more into the heat of battle, and the fighting renewed now in desperation;

Gonroku looked on with a smile. Valient men gathered round and Sakuma spied their bogie hero. Cutting and slashing his way thither, at last the coveted thing dropped helpless at a stroke; but lo! was it only a fox's head?

Katsutoya had flown, and the phantom army no longer a reality Sakuma gathered up the gruesome thing and hastening thither bowed humbly as tradition demanded; Gonroku sent him away, to wander in the woods, as others had done before, a ronin and a failure — Hideyoshi thus chanced upon him.

“What have you there, Sakuma?”

Sakuma hid his face.

“Speak, Sakuma; a friend asks it.”

Could this man, a daimyo, so degrade himself as to speak to an eta (outcast)? His appearance disclosed the cast, and Hideyoshi had eyes, it was claimed, in the back of his head. He must answer, yet dare not utter a word in the presence of a superior; custom forbade it, and he had just learned a lesson. No; a subterfuge must serve him: so thinking, Sakuma dropped his burden, and slunk back out of sight.

“Ha, ha,” muttered Hideyoshi; “a fox's head — I'll warrant he thought it Katsutoya's — reputed son of a foxier monk than Nobunaga or Christianity has yet outwitted.

“Here, Junkei. Exchange this for the real — no; he's safe, atop Hiyeisan, I'll warrant; a like one will do. Understand me?”

“Yes, honorable master.”

The likeness was soon enough returned — there were plenty of them in the ranks — and Sakuma was again brought in.

“Sakuma, you think yourself unfit to address even me: look at this,” commanded Hideyoshi, holding up to view the bloodless face.

Sakuma obeyed; there was no law or privilege that he knew depriving him of so flagrant a sight. All the joys of heaven could not have won him more; it seemed to be the head he really coveted.

“I am your servant,” promised he, and the two of them bowed respectfully.

“Then carry this thing forthwith to Shibata; it shall be the means no less of his undoing than of Yodogima’s making — ”

“Of Iyeyasu — a plaything.”

CHAPTER V

SAKUMA had served his master and met the foe as became his better judgment; but an older belief on the one hand and newer tactics on the other defeated him.

The master himself was harrassed with a ruse no less potent to the southward; Hideyoshi had sent Niwa — fired at the promise of spoils — with only forty men, to light torches on the mountain side, and Shibata, overloaded as he was, saw here, too, a great force: Hideyoshi, hearing of Katsutoya's defeat and Shibata's fears, threw down his chop sticks and jumping to his feet, exclaimed with joy:

“I have won. I have won a great victory.” Then mounting his horse, rode out to battle as became him.

“Takiyama, with one-half the army, will move upon the northern pass: Kuroda, with the other half, hold against the southern: Hideyoshi, with his staff and a small body guard, shall make his way, as best he can, between the two, toward — Kitanoshi. Let no temporary success induce either one of you to venture into the enemy's territory; Hideyoshi commands.”

The actual presence of these two vast armies drove consternation finally into the hearts of Shibata's now wavering followers. Takiyama cut down Gonroku's

halting force in the north and sent the jealous, vacillating son himself into the hills a loser and a renege. Kuroda met and dispersed Takigawa and his relieving army, Shibata's ally, at the south. Hideyoshi had met and dispatched Sakuma upon a still deadlier mission — Shibata had been routed and, with only a hundred staid adherents, made his way toward Kitanoshi, fully resolved upon his course — but it remained for another to turn the trick to some purpose other than ruthless bloodshed alone.

After parting with Yodogima at Kitanoshi, Iyeyasu had made his way forthwith to castle Fuchu, his friend Maeda's estate, in Echizen, near by, with the settled intention of forming some sort of alliance that might enable him to take and hold his love, Yodogima, no matter what the outcome between Shibata, her father, and Hideyoshi, the usurper.

Thus when Shibata, too, in his retreat, called there, to ask the loan of a fresh horse, the two were brought into direct contact most unexpectedly.

“You are a young man, Iyeyasu; and, were I in your place, I should make peace with Hideyoshi. For me, it is impossible; I must save the honor of my house, as our fathers before us have done. Take heed, my friend.”

Both Iyeyasu and Maeda proffered him assistance, or an escort, but he refused them. The former because it were too late — his mind had been made up — and as to the latter it might endanger them

and disgrace him were they to be seen leading a suicide to his mat.

“My family awaits me; it is alone their due and my privilege, this honored rite. Good-bye.”

Iyeyasu fell back, dazed with the intelligence; he knew that Maeda would keep his word, and that every member of the household should share his fate. No descendant of the Taira would be found wanting or unmindful of the bushida — Yodogima must be saved, if at all, by some agency without the pale of his doing or her understanding.

He might have overtaken Shibata and defeated him of his purpose, but that could do no more than add insult to well-meaning, make it still more incumbent upon the family, and Yodogima in particular, tempered as she was, to wipe out the stain accruing.

Thus puzzled and overcome, the conscious young lover made the necessary excuses and mounting his horse rode out into the woods, keeping to bypaths and unfrequented places, the better to contemplate some proper course as well his duty. He was disconsolate, and loitered slowly along, whipping at stray branches or humming words of recent cheer.

“Fain save your song, and guard better the stroke,” growled a hard-looking outcast, hit and staring behind the bush at one side.

Ordinarily Iyeyasu should not have minded the thrust, but something in the voice, though more the manner of the occasion attracted him.

“Come out, my fellow, or I shall cut you down,”

threatened he, grasping the hilt of his sword and turning upon the ruffian, to that one's very great surprise.

"My clothes are a warning; I am empty, and without shelter — yet can serve you," said the eta, stepping forth, with a big bundle tied fast at his back.

"Ha, ha; etas would serve lords, and lords, their doom, in these times—how would you set about making me happy; Shibata is far away by this time, villain?" sighed Iyeyasu.

"Ah-ha-a — I nearly lost my tongue — to do that it would be necessary for you and me to change places."

"For how long, innocent thing?"

"Till Yodogima rights us."

Iyeyasu sprang to the ground; the name of his love on such lips were more than he could bear without a vengeance. The occasion for such intelligence for the moment unnerved him, and no sooner had he raised sword to strike than his fellow straightened up, removing a mask, whereat Iyeyasu gasped:

"Sakuma!"

"Yes; it is he; lend me your horse and I shall do you the service."

"Very well — but the bundle: what about that?"

"Oh, yes; if you like, you may hold it till Shibata returns; he shall want to see it, and Hideyoshi rightly trusts me; it's a good security."

Iyeyasu knew his man and believed him true; hence carefully closed the sack and himself tied up the end — it seemed a gruesome task, but Yodogima were

worth any price imposed; so he shouldered the bag and once again made his way toward his friend, Maeda's house, for were his accomplice successful at informing Shibata, and could the determined father but see that face once more, there remained no doubt in his mind as to what the outcome should be.

Nor was Hideyoshi any the less advised, or conscious, or alert, as to probable results; in the absence of Iyeyasu he had run in upon Maeda — also his friend — knocking hard upon the door with his cutlass and calling out:

“Mataza, Mataza!” (Maeda's given name.)

Maeda welcomed him, and as they stood chatting about an alliance, wherefore especially the visitor had called, Iyeyasu came trudging in.

“What unsightly thing have you there, Iyeyasu?” inquired the host, withal reassuringly, if somewhat suspiciously, considering the identity of their newest guest.

Iyeyasu carefully set the bundle upon a convenient bench, and would of his own will, under the circumstances, have made short work of Hideyoshi had not the offence been unpardonable to any host, much more so with Maeda, whom they both respected as well as courted.

Hideyoshi appeared to be not at all disturbed, though he scanned carefully the bag and may have remembered seeing it before, and as much as fairly guessed its contents.

“A fox, I reckon,” ventured Hideyoshi, by way of

compromise; "they are plentiful in these parts, so I am told. Where did you get it, Iyeyasu, and is it a whole one, or only the head? Come; out with it, and I'll stand sponsor."

Iyeyasu would fight, if needs be, but could not bear an insult, particularly at the hands of this so-called monkey-faced upstart — though he had just routed Shibata and now bade fair to win over their mutual friend Maeda.

"Come closer," said Iyeyasu, "if you would really know the contents of this significant little bag; I may not soon again have such pleasure."

"My sword, if you like, Iyeyasu."

"No, thanks; you may yourself have need to use it."

"Upon my word; you don't mean to infer the thing's alive?" suggested Maeda, a little nervous.

"Look," demanded Iyeyasu, apparently somewhat angered.

"As I said; but what did you do with its body; I see only the face?" retorted Hideyoshi.

"What is it, Maeda?" inquired Iyeyasu, a bit perturbed.

"A fox!" stammered the host, fairly white in the face.

"It's a trick, I'll promise," ventured Iyeyasu, no longer doubtful of Hideyoshi's motive — or powers.

"Then let us turn it to some good use; friends have no better guarantee than constancy; I'll carry it back, to where you got it, and see it's done; wrangling widens only the gulf it would span; the circle is

but a square not wholly produced," said Hideyoshi, fully conscious of Iyeyasu's master intention.

"Silly twaddle, for serious men," muttered Maeda, upon parting and going each his way, as solemnly if doubtfully pledged.

The flames were yet raging when Hideyoshi reached the outskirts of Kitinoshi; Shibata had sooner entered the city, and lest any part of his treasured place should escape expurgation the sorely beaten and vainly tried daimyo began resolutely to apply the torch upon passing the outer ramparts, and did not cease until the fire had spread in every direction. Inside the palace all was confusion. His intimate friends had gathered in a last sad attempt to console a dying chieftain. For a lifetime they had served him and his and now that the time had come they would do him honor in death.

"It is the will of Kami (God)," said he, "that I am defeated. Do you serve me yet?"

"Yes," they all cried, eagerly.

"Then it is meet that I do something to show my appreciation of such loyalty. Let a feast be spread and the sake brought in and music provided that we make merry, for to-morrow we shall be — dead."

The flames roared and raged without, and they sang and danced and composed until a late hour. Not a soul there would but suffer the torments of hades to quench the thirst for chivalry — they should have died a thousand times to die an honorable death, to go peacefully to rest in the embrace of a master's rite.

Presently the fires burned low on the outside, and the spirit increased correspondingly within; the sake cup was passed round, each taking his final leave.

"Asai, my good wife," inquired Shibata, "will you not go from the castle? Hideyoshi will not harm you, a daughter of Nobunaga."

"Why in the flesh, if the spirit rebels? I am yours in death as I have been in life. Do not turn me from you: let me die with you," begged she, bowing low down, on the mat before him.

"What greater joy could heaven contain?" responded he, wholly absorbed.

Then a fox vainly leaped among them, and Shibata stared hard past Yodogima—a head stood perched upon a faggot at her back.

"Cannot you see them? Two—one on either side, reaching farther than Fuchu—Sakuma weeps: Katsutoya laughs—Yodogima!"

"Yes, father."

"Do you not—help me?"

"I had thought to let—but some strange thing seems to possess us."

"What is it, daughter?"

Yodogima hesitated.

"You have eyes?" suggested he.

Her heart throbbed painfully.

"You would not deny me?" plead her father.

The blood rushed into her face; and Katsutoya laughed outright: Shibata tremblingly urged:

"Speak, daughter."

The one pleading, the other taunting, drove hard the will, yet thought rebelled, and Yodogima's face turned rigid. Peace had been his and faithfulness her own had not this, the bitterest test of living, come at last to stay the hand of death. She might have evaded him, but the very thing she sought forbade it. He must dishonor her were the truth known. She had sinned, and tradition proffered not repentance. What was it, then, that moved Yodogima to answer as she did? Some subtle influence had wrought her father's decline; they were then contemplating together the virtue of an only salvation, and — Yodogima, too, saw a face: it beckoned: she answered:

“Iyeyasu!”

“He? The maker of our destiny?” demanded Shibata.

“Yes. My lover.”

“How so, Yodogima; you had not mentioned this?”

“You denied me the privilege — as you imagine me now.”

“Ah, ha — you would mock really a parent? Then go from me; and learn what it is to desecrate the gods. And that you may drink to the dregs, I send your two sisters along to do you service thereat. No daughter of mine shall disgrace me in death — be gone!”

The fires were then lighted in the rooms all around them. Shibata and Asai, his wife and only hope, withdrew into an inner chamber. The floors had been

covered with straw, and the flames leaped up — Yodogima turned to go, and two faces, one hideous, the other smiling, greeted her.

A cross and an image bore they — thence duty called her; the purpose stood revealed.

CHAPTER VI

WITH her eyes thus opened, mysticism disappeared: the elements crackled, and out of consciousness there arose a determination to survive any test that might be imposed. All her tender life had been surrendered faithfully and uncompromisingly to the harsher edicts of conventional man; and stern realism had bidden her renounce every impulse; there had seemed no alternative to save honor—the gods demanded it, the family claimed it, and self had not dared deny death its sole reward.

Then, as womanhood arrived, barely kissed faint consciousness, in one stolen rapport, just an unguarded moment, the godlight once shone in, had seized upon her, made it seem as if there was a heaven, as if God himself had touched her very soul and the blessed come to earth—a little thing as insignificant as any worm or bird or animal, only a fox, had come between her and what she might have had for the taking; and that, too, without disturbing as she believed her father's plans in the least or suffering the pain of being left in the world to do penance for a thing that she knew to be wholly beyond the reach or concern of her own insignificant little self.

Yodogima had been cast out, degraded, and left to makeshift, but not defeated. In that one moment of

utter helplessness she had resolved to meet the world as found, and to make of life what God intended — an abiding faith in that we know and not a conjured reach toward something fancied.

Iyeyasu had promised her protection — his love he had given her — and she believed him capable and true; that she had renounced Katsutoya and accepted Iyeyasu rightly, though against every obligation that she knew developments had proven beyond peradventure. Her father had anticipated an impossibility, asked her to stultify every moral consideration on her part to gratify an ambition of his, that proved at the first test to be utterly groundless and without the shadow of a compensating hope. Accident or will had denied her the privilege of an explanation; fate alone, for all she knew, had interposed to lay bare the secret of her heart at an inopportune moment, and a fancied code had sought to crush her beneath its ruthless dictum at a time when the very heart-chords of repentance called loudest for pleasing atonement.

It seemed as if the same god who had torn her therefrom must save her unto himself; and her heart bled for him alone.

“Iyeyasu,” cried she, more confident than ever.

Her voice seemed to die close underneath the angry elements; but quickly — all this had crowded upon her instantly — strong arms, others than she had allowed, gathered her up, together with her two sisters, younger than she, and placing them in chairs made

their way through the charred, falling remnants of all that had been so dear to her, toward the woodland, not far distant, to the southward.

The glare of the lights and the lamentations of the populace startled her, and she would have turned if only in some small way to their relief, but the bettos (carriers) ran on, heeding neither her pleadings nor their own safety so long as they might serve — their employer, Sakuma, who led the way.

They had gone some distance and almost beyond danger from the burning city before Yodogima had discovered him or knew who it was that planned and directed her flight. It gave her confidence, and she did not call out lest her interference might disturb him; nor did she fear thereafter the course they took, though it seemed a strange direction and an ominous exit — there was one, lurking behind, however, following their every movement, dodging from corner to corner and street to street, who knew better than she just what to expect and where to intercept them.

All these doings were as a blank to Yodogima, whose only thought now was of Iyeyasu. That soon she should reach him, was at that very moment on her way thither, and that he, strong and virile, should make due atonement for this, that she had suffered, would forthwith claim her as his own, and after all make life worth the living was the sole consciousness that bore her onward. Duplicity, with its cold, futile aims, as barren in the end as Iyeyasu's waiting might

prove disastrous, were a thing wholly beyond her knowledge or comprehension.

They had not gone far into the woods, however, till the confiding princess had good reason to witness, if not apprehend, something of the clashing motives that underlay her further progress. Sakuma had led them to the right, toward the thick of the forest, and Yodogima's pulse then began to slacken and her throat filled and choked her; she knew that Iyeyasu's domain lay to the left, over the mountains, through Mino, in the southward, and supposed him there, as reason would dictate. They were now travelling northerly, into the west, where Hideyoshi might be expected to be found scouting or encamped: it grew dark and difficult of going: Yodogima wondered and conjectured, till fear seized hard upon her.

Presently the bettos halted, and resting the poles upon their staffs breathed heavily, the while speculating among themselves as to their further task. These fellows, then, did not know where they were to go, and the probabilities multiplied in Yodogima's mind.

Sakuma had gone on, into the dark, as if in search of an outlet; then a sudden whipping and snapping of twigs, at one side, distinctly heard only by Yodogima, apprised her of the swift running of someone, apparently past them and after Sakuma. Directly a low gurgling, and hard thud upon the ground startled her once more into bare apprehension.

Yodogima uttered not a word, but listened; the

betto talked on; no other sound reached her ears; then the brush rattled, and it occurred to her that somebody's clothing had been changed; she waited; a man tramped along, not close enough to be scrutinized, but within hearing distance — whose outline appeared a trifle taller than Sakuma — till directly opposite, when he commanded the bettos to change their course and follow him.

CHAPTER VII

THEY had gone back into the open, turning again toward a course to the southward; bearing a little to the west, along the well-travelled roadway that led directly into the main pass over the mountains through Mino, for Mikawa, Iyeyasu's domain; where stood Okazaki castle, his birthplace and inherited fortress. To this place, enchanted as it now seemed to her, Yodogima would have gone a willing slave to its master's caprice and otherwise still a devoted helpmeet in the rendering of an established and expansive, if cruelly submissive order.

It was yet dark, but the bettos pattered along at a lively gait; a trifling advance promised in their wage had allayed any misgivings that they might have had as to a possible change of leaders; and glad, moreover, of the less burdensome or hazardous going now confronting them, their progress became as rapid as the escape seemed propitious.

The way lay through a richly cultivated and thickly inhabited valley, bespeaking a prosperous and friendly environment. Yet it was dark, and these things were not discernible — no lingering light shone forth, nor belated dweller accidentally peered — save for an occasional howling round some dismal corner, or the hard, smooth-worn curbstone's welcome reply. Yodogima leaned restfully back in the chair; Jokoin, her

youngest sister, yet innocent and fair, had gone to sleep, contentedly: only Esyo, next older, with cold, penetrating look, and rigid, exacting manner, sat upright, wrangling with this one or that the probable outcome of such daring do.

"You are a winsome, headstrong thing," threatened she, of Yodogima, as their chairs came close together, in a broadened stretch of road, where the bettos were wont to gossip in venturesome consultation about a possible rest. "Only for you, I might have been permitted — as any true daughter should be — a more logical, if not less unbecoming, situation. Here it is, dead of night; and Shibata, a lord daimyo's whole bevy most uncomfortably trudging through goodness knows what; and all to no purpose, I am sure."

"Be quiet, Esyo," commanded Yodogima, not the least bit impatient; "you shall soon enough find it convenient, if not agreeable, to discuss till content some of the urgencies: the proprieties had best take care of themselves — for the present, it would appear, to your faithful, if unworthy, sister."

"Who said that you are unworthy? Come, Yodogima; don't be unreasonable."

"Please do not get excited."

"I am not excited, I tell you; and had you my temper you should not have fallen in love with that Iyeyasu; nor would you have so forgotten yourself as to wholly disregard better discretion by clinging to him — why didn't you tell father it was a myth, the

face a mysticism, and his decision most unreasonably mystifying — ”

“Oh, sister ; how you talk ; in that case you shouldn't have been here, or anywhere ; and, Iyeyasu is very real.”

“Quite like all the rest : a pack of them — all of them, every one like the other.”

“And I am not so sure but Esyo, herself, might prove to be the best quarry among us : take care that you do not give me further cause, to suspect as much ; more I dare not.”

They had travelled a long time, it seemed months to Yodogima, when, without warning, in the dawning light, their leader, with uncovered face, thrust his head into Yodogima's presence, cautioning her : -

“Trust me, Yodogima ; I have given proper instructions to the bettos ; I must now leave you.”

Yodogima drew back with alarm, too frightened to make answer or to comprehend him ; it was Katsutoya she recognized.

Thus leaving his charge to fare as best they might, under the instructions given, Katsutoya sped on, into the distance, purposing to reach and advise Iyeyasu if possible of what he had done toward saving Yodogima from the clutches of Hideyoshi ; who in parting with Iyeyasu had done as promised : returned the bundle to where Iyeyasu had found it. Sakuma, however, did not reappear as expected ; instead there came another, also disguised ; and equally taken aback, as well as penetrating, both Hideyoshi and Katsutoya

for once blundered expediency to gain some sort of intended advantage.

Katsutoya, therefore, and not Sakuma, had saved the princess, and with all his energies now sought to advise Iyeyasu, in whose service he believed he would fare safer and welcome. It proved to be a long and a hard run to Fuchu, where Iyeyasu yet remained, waiting. Squads of Hideyoshi's troops and scouts already infested the country, and the by-ways and brush-covered hills proved hard of traversing, yet Katsutoya faithfully and hopefully pressed on, reaching his destination exhausted and sore.

"What brings you here, and at this time?" inquired Iyeyasu, coldly; when confronted by the messenger, eager and positive.

"I would do you a service, though I am but an out-cast, as you see," replied Katsutoya, earnestly.

"As others have done — more discreetly. Go. I have no confidence in pretence. Iyeyasu shall, hereafter, select his own assistants. Sakuma, at least, taught me a lesson."

"And Katsutoya shall teach you a better one, though you do refuse me. Hideyoshi shall have hunted out and claimed your Yodogima long before Iyeyasu has made up his mind to do more than wait. And to show you that Katsutoya is your friend and not a rival, as you have it, I lend you my disguise, that you may find a way home; there to pander to jealousy and defend your life. Greatness lies rather in aggressiveness. Good-day, sir."

So saying, Katsutoya disappeared, before the astonished Iyeyasu had fairly recovered his breath. Those words, however, burned deeply into his consciousness, and he would have run after his supposed rival had he dared venture, undisguised, beyond the confines of his friend Maeda's protection.

Iyeyasu knew only too well that he had been tricked by Hideyoshi; that his recent bravado and promised alliance had been feigned for immediate effect; that his troops were at that very moment scouring the country, he himself fully believed without even a suggestion from Katsutoya or anyone else; that his own neck were in danger he was wholly aware — from political motives, however, and not as a result of any clashing of love interests; in his dull mind, Hideyoshi had no more thought of taking a defeated daimyo's daughter to himself than Katsutoya had of befriending a successful rival. His household seemed already full enough.

"Hideyoshi in love, and a wife and some three hundred, now? Bosh!" muttered he, to himself, though donning the disguise and preparing for flight. "Thanks, however, to Hideyoshi's cleverness, we shall see no more of Katsutoya, vain wretch — Yodogima is still alive; he just as well as said so, and the gods shall see that Iyeyasu gets his due. I can wait, yet go I must."

Iyeyasu set out unattended and forlorn; while the bettos were landing Yodogima, hopeful if not happy, at an appointed tea-house in the rugged mountains

capping an upper arm of the valley through which they had climbed. Here, Katsutoya had directed her to remain; it was secluded, and not far distant from the main highway over which her lover must make his exit, through the otherwise almost impassable range.

It had grown warmer with the rising sun and a sheltered environment, yet Yodogima waxed the more eager and became less tolerant. She knew the locality well enough, but somehow could not bring herself to believe Katsutoya bent upon anything but downright betrayal. They were sitting in the open, at the rear of a large room, on the second floor, overlooking a deep gorge below and the broad valley farther on in the distance. Jokoin chafed under the restraint, and Esyo scolded.

"I can see no harm in going below, and into a public room — we are daughters of Shibata, and there is a man down there; I hear his voice."

"Jokoin! What is to be done with you? We are alone, and outcasts —" began Esyo, half intended for Yodogima.

"The more the need of cultivating someone's friendship," retorted Jokoin.

"But we have no means of an introduction, and do not know that it is a gentleman."

"Let us forget form: I hear a sword rattling."

Yodogima made neither protest nor comment; she was content to let Esyo wrestle it out with Jokoin, whose good sense she believed quite the better of her

indiscretion. Therefore, when Jokoin finally led down the stairs, with Esyo close after, their eldest sister, sitting back upon the soft-matted floor, turned her thoughts far away, and to things beyond the staid comprehension of the one or above the emotional reach of the other.

All these things around her, men and women had called real; but to her they seemed very unreal. She had been brought into the world and set down among them without a voice or a hand in the making. Reality, this? Far from it. Why, the very food they ate was not what it seemed, the roof overhead but a creation, and for all she knew her own clothing might be the merest makeshift as against a real, a truly penetrating eye. These, then, were but resulting products, and of what? Ideality?

Her own soul cried aloud for something better, purer, and more certain than all these sordid trappings of man's little endeavor. There must be an ethereal, a state transfixed — of earth, but infinite — and could she only resolve its quantity the elements had afforded a way; the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and all that there is upon it were but the atoms of an endless progression, fixed and apportioned by the same compelling, abiding agency that had touched her and bound her when confronted with a natural and unhindered attraction.

The mountain-top hung high above: she wanted to get there, to some place far away from vulgar witnessing, and there seek communion with the spirit

that seemed so near yet nowhere within reach. Man had brought forth nothing not deceptive, failed utterly of conception — a province wholly within the grasp of woman, the more her reason.

Having at last resolved to press the quest alone and untrammelled, Yodogima ran out and along the narrow veranda to the long, smooth-worn steps that wound up and around the mountain-side to its summit in the background. The climb was not a hard one, and as she went she remarked the usefulness to which the hand of man really had been put. Yet there seemed a want of guidance, and upon arriving at a deserted temple the poverty of his understanding became the more painfully apparent.

History recorded ages and cycles of crowding and striving and yet how much had been done to show that anything more than nature had inhabited this earth? A few houses, here and there a crooked, stumbling highway, now and then a ship at sea, all temporary, and so little of beauty! Really it seemed a pity that so much good rich blood and vain high sounding words had been expended upon nothing more than barely living: then, approaching the summit, nearer and nearer, his track or touch began to disappear, presently became extinct, and no such delight had entered her heart, save once before. Heaven, limitless and real, encouraging the utmost within her, seemed a thing of consequence; and the earth receding and vanishing and lost, with its humdrum and vanity but an atom engulfed, were as if a memory —

disappearing and forgotten over against the invisible grind of a moulted, seething yesterday.

Sitting down upon a clean-washed, sun-dried and nature-fashioned rock, there waiting—no vulgar thing or mad intellect had touched it—Yodogima looked all around, then fastened her eyes upon a blushing bluebell that tenderly upturned its sweetened lips in token of the message she sought. A cuckoo flew also there, perching itself in defiance: Yodogima whispered:

“Sing to me.”

The bird listed mute and wanting.

“I’ll help the cuckoo to sing,” replied she, vouchsafing to waft her melodies on the light, over-sounding air.

The little thing answered her, only as it could—but out of its song there arose the voice of—

The bush rattled at her back, and springing to her feet, and turning quickly round, Yodogima shrieked:

“Hideyoshi!”

CHAPTER VIII

“**Y**ES; it is he — and you need not start at my presence. I hear that I am, by some, called vulgar; by many, said to be cruel; I know only that I am human: that the touch of your garment would rouse in ordinary man a passion fiercer than the flames: that I myself would make you queen; yet you are as safe from harm in my possession as he — the man you just now fancied more than manly — is impotent to render in the least a real consolation or a substantial aid. That you may realize fully that I am true and not false, I tender you the only instrument that ever made or unmade god or man. Do with it and with me as you like; you are both strong of arm and quick to see,” urged Hideyoshi, approaching and tendering with much reverence the hilt of his unsheathed, if vain, resolver of ethics.

Yodogima frowned. All the womanhood within her revolted at such boasted display of wanton cowardice. That man never is right till might has made him so, she could well believe; that might is right in the eyes of the gods were as incomprehensible to her as it seemed satisfying to him.

“Look me in the face,” demanded she, without lifting a foot.

Hideyoshi colored, and bowed only the lower: his eyes shifted about reluctantly, and useless.

"Shame!" threatened she, advancing a step.

"I am advised of no better means than —" began Hideyoshi, cold with suspense.

"A bluff? How often have you practiced this sort of ennui upon others, perhaps more tolerant? I would set a better example," interposed Yodogima, snapping his weapon against the ground and casting the fragments away.

"Well done," promised he, recovering somewhat his composure. "But haven't you oversaid yourself, a bit? The tables turned, however, may be more becoming; I can prove my valor: a broken heart is less easily mended. I need not suggest, of course, that you yourself might name — the terms?"

"No, no," gasped Yodogima, as the possible fate of Iyeyasu flashed into mind.

"Then it is really quite unnecessary to arrange it — yet I had sooner meet a worthy man than fall begging of a pretty woman. Come; I shall take you whether you will or not, with or without the means, before or after the test, temptation or provocation. Let us be off, to Azuchi, where the muses hold their tongues and order wins fairly the heart."

"Captivity implies compulsion — in some instances; but our lord's behavior convinces me that I might have fallen into less — considerate hands."

Hideyoshi led the way down along the winding incline and back into the very place which she had but a short hour thence deserted; in a more hopeful, if less certain, mood. The same walls enclosed the

front and sides, the outlet at the rear had not changed at all; humanity seemed continuing its blind rush toward an ideal bolstered with ten thousand times ten thousand conjured notions: the breath of ages smelled as sweet and wholesome as it did before she had quitted there and gone to the mountain's crest: her heart beat as warmly for her own chosen lord as ever; but something within, a silent mover of the senses and regulator of the mind, told her that were that love to ripen and shed its fruit something better than waiting and a thing more potent than might must intervene to stay the hand of probability — and together with consciousness came the sting.

Then the will arose, calling loudly upon the often fickle, but now most worthy, God of Constancy to lead her truly and deliver her aright unto the man she believed incapable of design; much more, fully competent to make the rescue.

“I do love you — I know it now — O Iyeyasu — my love, my faith, my hope.”

The men and trappings rattled and tramped on the outside; preparations were making for the march, and Hideyoshi now more than ever scolded the lines and spruced his bearing. The fortunes of war had made him master of central Japan, had given him the capital and placed him in possession of the emperor, but the wiles of a woman taxed more heavily his energies.

Whether to overawe with guards and poltroonery or to encourage by liberties granted and confidences bestowed, were to him, now, under the circumstances,

and in this case, quite as vital a matter as had been in ordinary times the choice between tweedledee and tweedledum.

The princess, herself, had made light of his own puerile methods; he had purposely refrained from demanding, as was the custom, the head of his old-time rival, Shibata, her father, solely in the hope of soothing and inspiring her: had he failed also in that? Iyeyasu had been allowed to escape, that terror should not drive his coveted love to a last extremity; but seemingly all his plans had miscarried, placing him now at the brink of a still more vital blunder — and win he would: if unfairly, none the less manly, for that.

Her two sisters had disappeared — Takiyama had laid siege to the one, and the other scolded the way along to keep her company and see that Hideyoshi's second best general proved a diligent escort.

The roads were smooth, withal their crookedness and the rugged aspect of the country through which they entered to pass. An occasional rabbit jumped away, into the thicket, none the wiser for a strange, harmless fright, and Yodogima marvelled the dextrousness of his small endeavor. Could she likewise defeat or escape harm? No; civilization had reduced her to less agile and more hardened methods. And for what? They had gone into a thickened cluster of stragglingly growing pines with drooping, needle-laden branches and no dry leaves or fallen limbs to rattle and crackle underneath. It was now getting

dark again, and the probabilities of the occasion caused her to peer and listen with more than ordinary anxiety, yet no spook had ever roused in her so much as a possible thought.

The advance had gone on, rapidly, and were by this time far in the lead. Hideyoshi had remained well behind, bringing up the rear and keeping the whole under observation with as little inconvenience or damage as likely; as he was wont to do under all circumstances and in much less trying situations than this, the proudest homecoming in his hard, eventful career. That part of the cavalcade in which Yodogima's chair constituted the principal charge had strung out along the roadstead in single file, and as there seemed no possible chance for escape in either direction the guards sang their way along in front or lagged behind in contemplation of the uncertainties foreshadowing a visit with their mothers or sweet-hearts at home.

Directly they had reached the darkest place, rounding a sharp curve, the princess leaned forward, staring vacantly into an ominous opening, covered and narrow, through the limbs and brush, at the lower side of the roadway. The same bettos that rescued her from the conflagration at Kitanoshi had been at her especial solicitation grudgingly retained for her further use upon this particular part of the renewed journey. They knew full well the reason — Yodogima slid carefully down from the chair and as cau-

tiously entered the gloomy place on which her eyes had all but riveted.

"Yodogima?" whispered a voice, that quickly set at rest her anxiously pulsating self, as to what it was and who it were so subtly attracting her attention.

"Yes, Iyeyasu — but you must not be discovered here. Let me go, and save yourself. The escape you propose would ill afford either of us the relief sought."

"Can you trust me, Yodogima?"

"I do."

"Then go; and, depend upon it, I shall recover you; your good sense convinces me of an abiding sincerity."

Iyeyasu again slunk off into the wilderness, and Yodogima, his love pledged anew, softly climbed back into the chair, without so much as attracting a concerned witness. To constancy there had been added assurance, and thence the heart waxed light and the mind clear — the will had sooner halted at no bounds.

"He shall have me, and I will know no other; poor, weak, insignificant woman that I am," resolved she, as the bettos at first slowly, then more rapidly, stretched forward to recover the small ground lost.

At Azuchi, to Yodogima's surprise — agreeable as it was — and Hideyoshi's chagrin, there developed at once much confusion and not a little bickering. Most of the three hundred or thereabout female court and household attendants already there took the matter of an additional three, though respectively young and

knowing and pretty, with something of indifference; arrayed against curiosity, of course; but there happened to be one among them, the lord daimyo's lawful wife and always best helpmeet, Oyea, who looked upon the introduction of three such princesses — whose character and former standing she had had, already, abundant opportunity as well as occasion to know and understand — with something more than ordinary concern if not outright suspicion.

This Oyea happened to be, as she herself well knew, the second wife of the rapidly rising Hideyoshi; the first one had been set aside early for no other reason than personal felicitation; and though Oyea had proven constantly his best adviser as well as most companionable personage she now held, perhaps not altogether without cause, some reasonable doubt about the future. Her husband had won his spurs, such as they were, with no other appreciable aid than her own good counsel, and now stood in a position to do pretty much as he pleased, political or otherwise, especially socially. His lordship was getting more restless, seeking new fields to conquer. She judged him rightly; had failed to render him an heir; and was she really, after all, to lose him, or his love?

Neither Jokoin nor Esyo caused her so much as a heart pang; the one frivolous, the other intrusive, could be of no other use to her husband than to serve some political necessity or trading convenience — in fact were forthwith adopted by him for those express

purposes. But Yodogima! Here came a victim who stood in the light of a possible intruder.

"Take her away," commanded Oyea, understanding her liege lord from the beginning and deigning to set her foot down only as she knew how and why.

"You wouldn't have me turn the princess, Shibata's daughter, out, would you? Come; let us be more charitable; the reason need not deter you, in the least; Oyea denies not to others traits she herself most admires."

The princess, finally admitted, upon terms — thanks to Oyea — more pleasing to her than satisfying to the would-be traducer, had gained from their parley more than a knowledge of just what to expect and how best to demean herself; she had not only won with modesty the friendship of his wife but thenceforth knew better than any other the weakest spot in Hideyoshi's hitherto unreadable make-up. Here at least the great daimyo had really halted in the enforcement of his will. No man had yet checked or escaped him in his onward rush toward the goal of an ardent ambition, but one woman, and that, too, his wife, had called a halt upon desire; perhaps a far more difficult thing of controlling than any mere mental trait. Oyea had temporarily interceded, though, without any other hold than mentality; why not herself, if she must, master him; having at least something more potent, with which to begin?

Nor had she long to wait for an opportunity to pit herself against him: as well, her sister Esyo. In

the final allotment of stations in the household, Jokoin and Esyo had been assigned quarters and allowed service befitting a younger and an elder daughter; but Yodogima fared in some respects better: in fact, was at once provided with attendance more elaborate and attention no less sumptuous than it had been theretofore the good wife's privilege to enjoy.

Oyea knew only too well what this meant in reality; but she had also measured the limit of her influence and sought by compromise to ease the burden of having ultimately to bear both the chagrin and the sorrow of tolerating under one and the same roof the fruits of a regularly established first-in-rank concubine.

She had made no mistake in Yodogima, however, and surmised from the first that would Hideyoshi succeed he must not only hold his own against outside influences but should find it necessary to combat not any the less at home the combined energies of two heads, both feminine and bent upon a common purpose.

Esyo reasoned differently. She was cold and negative by nature. Jokoin had gathered round herself all the available chivalry at the castle, leaving her less ardent sister to worry and resolve rather a more studied diversion. And jealousy soon developed an opportunity. She wrought accordingly.

Thus ensconced in time as satisfactorily as possible under the circumstances, Hideyoshi thought it best to let the women wrangle out among themselves the

ordinarily necessary little adjustments of so vital a beginning; hence, without much ado, and little encroachment upon the liberties or patience of Yodogima, set off toward Ozaka fully determined upon providing the young princess with a place and environment all her own. This important old fortress city — wrested in former years by Nobunaga from the turbulent monks — not only occupied one of the strongest natural sites for offensive and defensive purposes but offered as well some most advantageous prospects for residential beautification and enjoyment. The property already fallen into his hands, Hideyoshi forthwith gave instructions for the building of a castle that should outstrip anything of a like kind theretofore attempted.

“I mean to do this for Yodogima, and for her alone,” said he, to Oyea, who called him to task for such intended prodigality, “in consideration of the benefits bestowed upon me by her dear father in the performance of hirikara (suicide). You need have no fears, nor she any misgivings.”

The men were set at work, and Esyo began planning; she could not bear the slight, yet knew that her only prospect lay in Iyeyasu.

Dispatching forthwith a message (duly intercepted, of course) in which all of the facts were related with as much imagination as she could bring to bear upon the subject, Esyo deliberately set herself the task of undoing all that Yodogima had suffered to accomplish.

“Depend upon what I say, she has no thought or

intention of keeping or remembering her obligations to your own dear self or to any one else, not even her own abused and neglected sisters," wrote she, at length, winding up with the admonition that would he save himself harm he should act at once.

Having sooner made without any success several attempts at communicating with Yodogima, this first missive of an avowed friend — whom he believed to be turned somewhat practical and not at all sentimental — quite overcame Iyeyasu, wholly upsetting the meager plans that he had evolved for the at least temporary subversion of a prospective antagonist and the immediate recovery of his truly dearer than ever sweetheart. Conscious of the pitfalls with which she must be surrounded, yet he could not believe her untrue: realizing the dangerous ground upon which he must tread, still he would not for that refrain from attempting a personal visit; Yodogima had advised him: she, if recovered at all, must be released by some subtler art than war — Hideyoshi held it in his power to crush him, and was he any less a diplomat?

Hitherto Iyeyasu had held peace to be well gained at any price, but now that love possessed him, burned and coaled deep into the heart-chords, he had given up the future, sold his soul for the loan of a force with which to fight reasonably a single combat. Recalling the occasion, he would have thrust Hideyoshi through at the cost of a bushida: remembering Katsutoya's warning, the barest conception of a laggard wit

startled him into the first really energizing confession that he had ever made:

“I am unworthy of her.”

Everywhere around, men with less opportunity were rising as if metalled to accomplish anything. He, too, must do something to prove himself worth the confidence of a true love — why not trust Esyo? Designing to poison him against Yodogima, she had paved the way only to a more questionable undertaking — that of betrayal. Iyeyasu answered the message kindly, inclosing therewith another to Yodogima (also intercepted), informing her of his intentions and asking that she make ready.

‘Upon the arrival of the letter, Yodogima said:

“I am going to confide in you, Esyo; you are a sister — next to me — and have never proven false: I just must have the confidence of someone; it is killing me, this terrible suspense. Will you listen, dear?”

Esyo nestled close to Yodogima’s side, and looking submissively into her face, begged:

“Let us trust each other, Yodogima; otherwise how can we bear the awful burden of this horrid place?”

“Iyeyasu is coming; he has arranged it, and I am going away from here, to be his wife, never to part again.”

“How nice that will be — but the castle! Had you forgotten that?”

“Yes; it shall then be yours; and you, a more gracious queen.”

The bare thought of gaining such preferment only

at the will of a much sought after sister, and that, too, for the sake of serving rather her convenience, stung Esyo as no words could have done. She would fight out, now, the course sooner determined upon: hence Hideyoshi, on the very next day, found it agreeable to dispatch, without any compunction upon his part, an invitation to Iyeyasu forthwith to come to Azuchi, there to pay respects and claim his intended bride.

Other advice went along, however, as Jokoin well knew, which was neither intercepted nor answered, advising him to do no such thing, but to prepare himself at once for defense.

CHAPTER IX

IN the meantime Iyeyasu had concluded it wise to listen to the proposals of Nobukatsu, his nearest neighbor at the west and the eldest living son of Nobunaga: pretender to the father's estates and brother to Nobutaka, a recently defeated ally of Shibata.

This young man's prospects had been effectively shattered, in consequence of the fall of the latter and the removal of Ishida, his supporter, to Mino; still he searched everywhere in the hope of finding some daimyo minded and able to espouse his cause against the now only too patently determined usurper, Hideyoshi. Iyeyasu based small reliance upon any strength or power to be gained by as doubtful an arrangement, but wanted more some plausible excuse for the making of so unequal a stand; as had been prematurely forced.

Nobukatsu was generally looked upon as the rightful successor to his father's rank and place, hence any friendship shown to him should in one way or another develop some greater claim to popularity. It had also come to be considered by neighboring daimyos as little less than heroic even to dare attempt any sort of armed defense against the up-to-that-time invincible Hideyoshi. All these reasons were wholly patent to Iyeyasu — young, able, and perhaps ambitious. True he had not given any especial thought to the future,

save only the immediate relations growing out of an endowed situation, and — Yodogima. Love, with all its soothingly absorbent benefactions, remained uppermost in his mind: was the goad that directly spurred him to undreamed energies and unlikely undertakings, would risk his life and fortune for the pleasures of a single, transcendent joy.

Yet underneath this younger development there may have lurked the ecstasy of a sub-conscious determination to loom large in the more sordid events then subtly approaching. Iyeyasu bore the blood of the Minamoto; those giants of old, whose daring alone had curbed and clipped the Taira: with such a prestige, and so potent a cross, the temporarily humbled prince of Mikawa, Iyeyasu, may have inwardly harbored, without any apparent conviction or consciousness, the possibilities of a posterity acknowledging none other for father than Iyeyasu and for mother Yodogima.

And along with forced opportunity came the determination. Nobukatsu once in his power would also serve a ready means of compromise, in case of necessity. The two armies were therefore consolidated, and Iyeyasu commanding assumed adroitly the defensive.

Never for a moment underestimating Iyeyasu's strength of purpose and force of character, Hideyoshi made no less careful preparations, nor lost any time in hurling his combined strength against him. Hidenaga, his half-brother, forthwith recalled from Tamba, was placed at the head, outranking both

Kuroda, the Shintoist, and Takiyama, the Christian, respectively at the head of the two main divisions of the army and between whom vital differences had arisen; one of the reasons ostensibly for the introduction of a new leader and centralized authority — not, in fact, because Hideyoshi himself at all times and in every instance assumed absolute control and personal direction: also anticipating as punctiliously the possibilities of defeat, he would have someone upon whose shoulders to shift the blame and the odium, hence the second reason, for calling in Hidenaga, at this particular time.

“Do not, under any circumstances, allow some temporary success to induce you to follow up the enemy,” enjoined Hideyoshi, against his departing generals, as they marched off to war Iyeyusa into submission, or death — perhaps, in truth, if possible, the latter.

For the first time in his life, Hideyoshi remained behind. No doubt he, too, had, in his way, conceived the idea of a direct line, based also upon the progeny of none other than Yodogima — and himself. To do this he should not only crush Iyeyasu in the East, but must insure Yodogima against the dangers of intrigue at home.

He could trust Oyea; she had never failed him when treated fairly, and he believed her by this time fully cognizant of the motive and utterly disdainful of the effect that any such laudable undertaking might wreak upon their sole relations; amicably settled, hence reasonably sure of lasting countenance.

It was Esyo more than any other who caused him uneasiness. True he had read the correspondence and listened to her declarations without so much as a doubt about the consequences or a suggestion that could in any manner enlighten her, but what effect would these, to him seemingly childish hazards have upon Yodogima, a sister; and how would she demean herself in the face of overburdening contingencies, looming in all directions?

Without doubting in the least Hidenaga's ability or faithfulness, he would have personally gone to the front, immediately and without reserve: yet not alone Yodogima's safety held him back; he must know more of the natural workings of her heart, assure himself first that some hope of reciprocal regard might bless his innermost desire, for Hideyoshi would not risk the breaking of an unalterable law: would rather attune expediency to the demands of necessity, so threw himself headlong into the merciless throes of a self-willed, if far fetched, coquetry.

"I am interested to know more of your good self, and of your delights and aspirations, Yodogima," avowed Hideyoshi, frankly, and almost pathetically, as the two met, accidentally — it may have been intentionally — while strolling in the gardens, outside the castle buildings, and overlooking the broad, transparent waters of lake Biwa, in the distance.

Yodogima's heart fairly stopped, then beat ragingly, though her face and manner indicated no perceptible change or concern. She only looked the farther over

an unbroken surface, save now and then a ripple that yellowed and ruffled in the mellowed sun's rays of a cloudlessly departing mid-summer day.

"You, too, seem bewitched of a prospect that always gladdens, never denies me. Let us go there, you and I, where we may have the world to ourselves, leaving the castle, with its bickerings and battles and their equations, away and behind."

Nearly crying out, the now fast discerning princess, almost overcome with eagerness, held fast hold upon the face-chords; yet no longer vainly shying, permitted a somewhat closer approach than before — if none the less dignified or becoming, at that.

For the first time, though slight the occasion, Hideyoshi's heart bounded with relief. The exactions of war or the involutions of deceit no longer commanded first attention; the faintest relaxation of a hard-held and safely-guarded privilege had transfixed his whole energy, wrought a new being; though the destiny of a nation and the trend of government, henceforth and always, might evolve therefrom.

"You shall not condescend to answer by word, however pleasing that might be; goddesses have only to will it thus or that, and mere man must break his neck to do it so. Shall we go?"

"Toward Hiyeisan?" queried Yodogima, innocently, yet significantly.

"No; in the opposite direction; across the lake. I know a temple there, close down at the water's edge, better rid of a kind and more select about its visita-

tions, where we can drink deeply and no mortal shall question. Hence, Yodogima?"

On one condition — but will not to-morrow do; I cannot make answer so soon?" promised she, thoughtful to gain as much time as possible; having measured accurately the probabilities of Hidenaga's advance.

"Granted, my lady: what is it?"

"The condition is that my sister Esyo accompany us — Jokoin nor Oyea would be either serviceable or agreeable, as I believe, considering the purpose that you have in mind and the rebellion that pours from my heart. In as much, I have to ask you and you to grant only this: that you heed nor hold me any other or for more."

What? Have you not heard of the hostilities?"

"Yes; my sister told me about it."

"Esyo?"

"Yes."

"And — you have confidence in her?"

The answer already on her lips, did not escape him, though Yodogima hesitated; she had read him in time to save herself — surmised that he knew more than she would express or deny — and cogitating a happier conclusion endeavored to leave him standing as near the brink of certainty as it had been his pleasure to assume.

"You would have me disown a sister?"

"I would know you better."

"Then judge me with less compassion and more of wit; I take the responsibility —"

"Not of war?"

"No; but of its cause and consequence."

"I admire you all the more for that, though you leave me without a peg to stand on. Nor shall I surrender one whit the ground I've gained, no less an opinion formed. Take the whole family along, if you like: their gadding, a virtue stands you none the less in hand; to-morrow Hideyoshi shall know —"

"How it is to be tricked."

Ha, ha -- you think me easily done."

They sat upon the beach, in the afternoon of the following day, Hideyoshi listening with rising anticipation and Yodogima straining every wit she had, prolonging and intensifying the illusion. She did not know that Esyo had deliberately, if falsely, precipitated the conflict, nor was she aware of Hideyoshi's perusal of her own correspondence with Iyeyasu — all of it, excepting only the last letter, in which she had advised him to make peace at any price, save honor. Yet she was conscious that a conflict raged, was perhaps at that moment fighting to the death, between two unequal forces, in which no quarter should be asked or given, and that her own lover was desperately pitted in that struggle against the very man who held her captive, grovelled at her feet a weakling and a beggar.

"Why should I not surrender, if needs be, this frail body of mine to save him?" again and again rose in her mind, as often to be discarded and smothered as a thing utterly impossible.

"No; I'll yet win for him by subtler means an equal chance; and when I've done that—a woman cannot do less: should do no more."

A heron stalked by, disdainful a small crab that backed and snapped among the slime-washed rocks: Hideyoshi strained his eyes, meditating momentarily the legend of a bygone day.

"A Heike?" queried he, half aloud, rising to examine more closely the supposed Taira symbol.

Yodogima's throat filled, and failed of utterance.

"It's only a common sort," observed he, returning with the obstreperous little thing clinging tightly to the stick's end.

Reseating himself, the conversation for once began somewhat to lag. It was too soon yet to boat round shady points or tempt strange communications from the deep, so the two remained in the shade. Eoyo studied with unconcern the deeper mysteries of early dragon-fly catching and the strange cupidity with which the stupid long-bodied creatures permitted themselves to be ensnared and haled to bay. Only Oyea clung to the old temple, near by, farther up the long, sloping incline; two lions carved in stone stood sentinel there, and these she contemplated in prayer to the good god who as earnestly watched over them. Yodogima leaned forward, and for the first time induced Hideyoshi to return her look without avoidance, asking him:

"Do you believe in these tales of old?" conscious more of the temple than of crabs.

“Perhaps — only, I might say, as occasion serves or convenience requires.”

“Did anybody ever deem them differently?”

Hideyoshi had neither the opportunity nor any inclination to answer; a courier dashed up, breathless and expectant, presenting him with a message from the front.

“Ha, ha — the fight is on,” chuckled he, clapping his hands and dancing about hilariously.

The intelligence roused added interest, as it only could, but Yodogima continued in the full command of her presence. She would have gladly surrendered her life for a moment’s encouragement to the man she loved, yet as circumstanced would not lose her hold upon him whom she loathed.

Hideyoshi approached closer: silence alone repulsed him, the wisdom she displayed made ready the pyre, and the dignity of her conduct set the torch that lighted within a conflagration that conserved no bounds. Only such as she could appease the appetite of a true god. He must have her, let the heavens fall.

“Tell them,” commanded he, “that Hideyoshi fights more fiercely, confronts a larger host, holds a vitaler purpose, augurs — is just now engaged at the battle of self. Go hence.”

The sun had set, and their little party, four in all, sat round a repast; spread and served with hands unsoiled, neither knowing an art nor upholding a truth other than as willed them.

Oyea looked her sole lord in the face; she saw no trace of chagrin or sorrow there; all her life had been devoted to the smoothing of his pillow, the making of a god, and to the serving of some purpose — just what, she had never stopped to consider. Yodogima sat near at hand, supremely reserved, withal grandly inviting. Hideyoshi, the husband, too, was there; and should Oyea be forgiven, perhaps, in that she conceived him a little more godly for the taste and the judgment of that selection? No other God condescended to answer. She believed him more than incarnate —

Another courier arrived, more anxious than the first.

Hideyoshi grinned, this time; saying, calmly, without any exultation:

“The enemy wavers, and is —”

Neither had this sentence been finished, when — Yodogima said not a word nor did she show any change of color, yet the blood seemed freezing in her veins — Hideyoshi threw down the message, exclaiming:

“Tell them they know not what they say; an enemy is never ‘defeated’ till captured, decapitated, and discredited. Go.”

Evening wore away, and none remained to render the night’s artfuller subtleties but Yodogomi and her now slaving protégé; servants and others less welcome, or more discerning, had found it convenient or expe-

dient to busy themselves in more directions than one.

Esyo, paling at the significance of that last message, no longer bandied discretion or consulted verity in the making up of her mind just what she should or would do. Iyeyasu had been deceived and a sister betrayed — what mattered; she would set things right, at the cost of double-dealing — another?

Still a third courier bounded into the open room in which they sat or lounged at will.

Hideyoshi grew apprehensive as he read; and gripping the message, snarled:

“Iyeyasu retreats — ”

Without concluding also this sentence or changing his attitude, the puzzled daimyo, still blindly unconscious of his own predicament, but bitterly alive to the probability of Hidenaga's speedy annihilation, turned to Yodogima, shamefully betraying, as he had never done before, the inner hopelessness of a hotly contested, fiercely grinding will determination. Her head reeled — it seemed as if all were lost — but the body responded, revealing no trace of the terrible battle she fought: on higher grounds than he had conceived or Iyeyasu felt — in consequence of dreaming, no less endangered by waiting. Forced and beaten, Hideyoshi could bear the suspense no longer.

“Is it possible — are you — in fact — a stoic? You appear to be unmoved — unresolved — yet — Iyeyasu by retreating has won — has proven himself — to be — a greater man than — no, no; I understand; know

'how it is to be tricked'! Yodogima, I have no fine speech to make or promises to render; to you, Iyeyasu owes it that he lives: an humbler admirer, only that he can better respect. — Stay, you, courier; Hideyoshi goes."

CHAPTER X

NEITHER Hideyoshi, nor Yodogima, for the moment, took any pains to discover or to suspect the identity of that last message-bearer; though had either one observed at all only the dishevelled clothing he might have been induced to look underneath the mask, hiding too slenderly a timid, anxious face. It were enough for Yodogima to know that her lover had risen to first place in the estimation of an only rival: for Hideyoshi to realize once and for all that the price of Shibata's eldest daughter was to be something dearer than the lone bagatelle of a daimyo's willing or the baser invocations of a traditional heritage.

Hideyoshi tore his way over the open road like mad. The vilest opportunity of his life had been denied him, a victory snatched away that seemed almost within grasp, and he himself written down an ass at a time when his name should have been heralded throughout the empire as invincible—and by the doing of a woman.

“Shame be upon they who think themselves sexed into heaven; it is might that makes us what we are—right or wrong, male or female, man or his kind. Then beware!” threatened he, as the dust rolled in the wake of his ride toward the field.

Nor was Yodogima less conscious of a dawning

respect for Hideyoshi. The knowing princess had expected harsher treatment, if not more subtle means, at the hands of her captor; who had, after all, proven himself a respecter of ability if not an admirer of virtue; and what if he should vanquish Iyeyasu and, in fact, carry out his ideas about total extermination? The very thought of such a possibility deadened every reason.

Esyo, too, had gone; she had devised less and reasoned more, conjured her sister ambitious and charged Hideyoshi with ungratefulness; she had witnessed, become conscious of the latter's growing regard for Yodogima in the face of all that she had done to check it—to further her own designs—and now turned to a newly devised, though less hopeful, expediency: overcoming with difficulty the distance, soon found herself in the bosom of Iyeyasu's command; a crooked purpose put to straights, knowing no rest and once off, she did not lag so much, in fact reached her destination before Hideyoshi had sighted his.

Thus abandoned by the only sister apparently left to her—without some hint or even a surmise as to the cause or purpose—and with a determined suitor speeding toward the destruction of the only one she loved, and with her own hands tied, and she powerless to succor him, Yodogima turned to composure alone for consolation—presumably a little body, unexpected and unmindful, careless and happy, as if an angel from heaven, tripped lightly into her presence, and throw-

ing down a big, ungainly mask, bantered, rather provokingly, if happily:

“You didn’t know me at all, did you?”

“Jokoin!” gasped Yodogima.

“Yes; and Hideyoshi, with all his eyes, never saw a thing. What stupid people.”

“How did you find the way, Jokoin; and — what brings you?”

“I came to tell you — I just couldn’t wait; they are such a poky lot, those captains and generals and would-be gallants — and it isn’t any trouble, at all, to go anywhere one wants to go — how did you like my disguise?”

“I hadn’t thought about that — it looks a bit scant — but where have you been?”

“Oh, I’ve had lots of fun; went to the front — but Takiyama is a bore; can’t think of anybody or talk about anything save someone, said to have lived sometime, called Christ — oh, but they’re a pesky lot, these Christians!”

“Jokoin! How you talk!”

“It’s their way and — quite catching, you know; they say, there are a lot of them, already — in Hideyoshi’s service, though.”

“Please do not, Jokoin; I cannot bear it — to hear you use such language.”

“Well, I gave them the slip, all right, and here I am — but where are the men? Is Hideyoshi the only one you had?”

“Sister, you shock me; I cannot understand you!”

"Oh, yes, you can. Just take a tumble. Turn a somersault—you have no idea how easy it is; and how stimulating, withal. I wouldn't be in love with only one man, at a time, as you are, right now, this very minute, for anything. It doesn't pay, at all, to be sentimental."

Yodogima did not answer, at once; she could not at first, for want of composure; afterwards, perhaps, because her own ideals seemed the harder to encourage in the face of such light-heartedness; but finally, that joy which is wrought only in the crucible of a convicted enlightenment opened wider still the floodgates of confidence, bidding her say:

"Jokoin, let me tell you that to love is a sacred thing; and if you care to win and hold a man's regard, then learn to use your tongue, but keep in hand the heart."

"As you did with Iyeyasu. Poor fellow. They say he is about to croak from distraction."

"I do not know what you mean; your speech has become quite unintelligible. Someone must have exercised a strange influence upon you."

"It's the newfangled religion—I've got it, I'll admit—though it's the worst sort of a makeshift and good only for those who need it, who practice it, and who believe in it. Why, Yodo, under it, you can do anything, then take a bath, bend the knee, and shout for Christ's sake: he'll do the rest."

"Horrors, sister; I do believe you are possessed!"

"So are you, Yodogima, and all the rest—every-

body, dead or alive, born and unborn; only you don't know it, and for that must suffer: they say, go to — well I can't just recall the name, and it's such a bad place I won't startle you with mentioning it."

"Please do not; I shouldn't comprehend it — but what of Iyeyasu? Why distracted?"

"Because of your advice, and Esyo's treachery; she fibbed on both of you to the one, and tried to inspire the other wrongly: between the two of you he has taken a tumble — as I but a moment ago said you might find it advisable or convenient to do. The whole enemy is afraid of him, their reports are all a pack of lies, and nothing less than Hideyoshi's presence can save Iyeyasu's doing about as he pleases, in these parts. Take courage, sister, and bet your boots on — the winner; I am going to return, for the fun, and if you wish shall give your love to — which one, Yodogima?"

Jokoin ran away, without giving her sister a chance to answer had she possessed the courage or the patience to do so; Yodogima loved too deeply, held life, that she knew, as against death, its natural consequence, too seriously revealed in the underlying humanities of an established conduct, to bandy truth for the sake of bolstering courage or lightening the burdens of an ordered continuity.

Oyea proved a better counsellor, more a comforter, and together they reconciled their returning, though weary it was, toward the castle whence they had departed so shortly, more hopeful, if less doubtful.

CHAPTER XI

THE homegoing over, both Yodogima and Oyea settled down to a kind of preconceived expectancy. Their place continued as before, under the domination of a single master, the husband of the one and admirer of the other, assuming the attitude more of respecter than lover to either. Neither outranked the other, as yet; nor did their proposed spheres, from Hideyoshi's way of thinking, in any manner conflict; nor were they at all inconsistent, as determined by custom or tradition from time immemorial, with good citizenship and right living: each cognizant of her duty, and mindful of the respect due to the head of the household as established and designed; no one jealous or hateful or inconsiderate of another, but thence possessed of the utmost confidence and respect for each other; they both set their hearts and energies to the accomplishment of one and the same end.

"Do you love Iyeyasu, Yodogima?" queried Oyea, one soft, suggestive evening, as they two sat in the opened-up room, meditating, together, more than contemplating, the possible outcome of that conflict — then renewed and waging between the one's lover, who had vowed to live only for her, and the other's husband, whom she loved and hoped for quite as much.

"I do," answered Yodogima, with brightening eyes and confident voice.

Oyea pondered now. She, too, felt the agony with which Yodogima — whom she had come to love — must receive the news: news that to her seemed otherwise impossible of coming. And Oyea had taken great pride in her husband's achievements; next to her love for him, it had been her greatest concern. Then she thought of her own position and Yodogima's chance should Iyeyasu fall; Hideyoshi spared not an enemy, and halted nowhere in the resolving of his plans: if not by force, then by subtler means — still harder to bear. Suddenly her expression strangely changed, and turning to Yodogima, she said, reassuringly:

"Then I trust he shall not lose."

Yodogima's eyes softened; and bowing low, out of respect, but struggling hard against scruple, the more finely wrought princess thanked her benefactress, saying:

"How can I ever requite such generosity."

Time wore away dull and anxiously at the castle, till presently word came of the great battle of Komakiyami, where Hideyoshi's advance had been checked, all his ready attempts at bribing the enemy's superior officers put to naught, and Iyeyasu with inferior numbers had, at last, given his opponent such a thrashing as none thought possible: in view of further developments, proving to be the initial of a series of engagements that were to revolutionize government, change

the trend of civilization, and leave, perhaps, its lasting imprint upon the future higher destiny of all mankind.

Iyeyasu drove the foe out of his territory and across the river, then halted to reorganize his broken lines and conserve better their resources; Esyo deliberately told him that Yodogima had grown indifferent, his own intelligence warned him of Hideyoshi's recuperation, and whether convinced of the former or frightened at the latter the not over confident victor in place of following up a first triumph resolutely set himself down again to defend, once more to wait.

Hideyoshi, on the other hand, had in the meantime found it convenient or wise to consult Oyea; and whether acting upon her advice to make friends with Iyeyasu or designing to accomplish by unfair means what he had failed of doing with arms began forthwith to reconstruct the shattered fragments of his sorely beaten army, recruiting with additional levies and intrenching himself as best he could to scare or mislead the enemy into remaining within the confines of his own domain. And there they stayed, bickering and bartering, one on either side the river Komaki, both afraid but eager, till diplomacy had been for the first time developed into a sufficiently vital force to make war a more extensive if not crueler means of settling dispute and rolling onward the vast, silent confusion of ethical entities.

To do this, and to carry forward each his advantage in the exercising of so little known an agency,

neither one halted, but adjusted his conscience in the use of instruments that the heroics had held sacredly above the sordid selfishness of eager quest; woman must be permitted to degrade herself — yes, should be used — that man's supremacy be not endangered or questioned in its strident march toward the goal of a collectively devised, pampered, vain, and self-denying individuality.

Esyo and Jokoin were both taken advantage of. The latter to carry tainted messages from a scheming father, by adoption only; she could cross the river and thus avoid an encounter that other men than Hideyoshi in those days had courted as manlier — Iyeyasu would not harm or hinder a sister to his love, whether doubted or mistaken, or both. Esyo served Iyeyasu in a like capacity; not, however, until the younger man had despaired of his challenge to the other to meet him in personal combat.

“Tell your master, or father, or whatever he is,” said he to Jokoin, in answer to Hideyoshi's repeated attempts, “that our contention is purely personal, and that neither he nor I have any right to compromise a matter of heart, or to sacrifice the lives of others and the welfare of a community to settle that kind of difference. Let us then invoke a juster means.”

“But we cannot do that except it be the will of the one for whom we fight; Hideyoshi shall not stop short of death,” replied he, without reserve.

It was agreed that they should abide the decision of Yodogima; but how obtain an impartial declara-

tion from her? Iyeyasu insisted upon her presence: Hideyoshi declared himself indifferent.

“If you want her to come here it will be necessary for you to fetch her: if you wish to right the matter there, why, then, go; until settled Hideyoshi shall employ such means as lie within his power to invoke.”

In possession, Hideyoshi's position seemed tenable; now, no one knew better than Iyeyasu the tactics with which his adversary would gain an advantage, though prone to make no promise or engagement that he should not keep. Nor did Iyeyasu let himself be deceived as to his own resources or ability. True he had won a great victory over Hideyoshi, had taught him to know that willing and doing are two very different terms, and that gods ready-made or self-devised are alike amenable to the unflinching laws of inevitableness, but would not budge his ground, Hideyoshi's resources or Yodogima's failure to the contrary notwithstanding.

Yet he must do something, either push forward or lose the vantage gained. What was it that stirred within and would not let him dismiss an only alternating thought:

“Compromise?”

“No, no; Iyeyasu could not do that; but — confidence! now I have it; I'll trust somebody — Eryo! she shall hear Yodogima speak the word, will tell me the truth; confidence and not compromise, therefore, is the final arbiter of our destiny. Then why doubt, why have I doubted Yodogima? No; it is my short-

sightedness and not her faithlessness that has caused me all these bitter misunderstandings; she will approve me right, and I shall prove her mine."

Slow with inception but quick to apprehend, Ieyasu's energies once kindled burned with a vigor and a glow as refreshing and as inspiring as waiting had been portentous. He would have it settled once and for all that his love had not been misplaced, and that he himself were the rightful suitor: Hideyoshi, but a mongrel pretender, an empty claimant.

"Go to Yodogima, and get her answer, if this monkey-faced deceiver would yet know that she is a princess, worthy a prince's love," commanded he, of Eryo — as she, and Jokoin, departed upon their mission, as arranged, under a truce, of sufficient length — no doubt whatsoever in his mind as to what that word should be.

The two sisters proceeded toward Azuchi, together and unhampered, united in their great expectations but widely divergent upon lesser grounds, those of apprehension. Eryo reasoned that Yodogima must say "No," and by so doing relieve her of the necessity for devising an untruth; Hideyoshi had sent Jokoin along for no other purpose than to make sure the delivery of the answer he, too, believed Yodogima should return. Jokoin anticipated alone the boredom of that to her way of thinking needless journey, for how could a princess, her own sister, so spoil a good prospect by saying anything but "Yes"?

They had arrived now, and Yodogima received them

in her boudoir — still open at the rear and overlooking the narrow lowland, butting up against a somber woods that covered a steep rising hillside beyond — yet it was growing late. There was no one to disturb them; Oyea had withdrawn to her own desolate chamber, apprehensive but resigned. Yodogima sat facing the dark of nightland. Jokoin at once became spokesman; she could not wait. Esyo held no interest in the gathering portent without, nor did she betray a conscious thought of things more ominous within. The clouds hung low and the air around dulled against the dead monotony of dawning sleep, over-borne and unrelated save as lettered against nature's unfathomed deep by myriads of changing, ever-noiseless fire-flies.

"Come reason with me, with you and with him, verily the God-truth to know," pleaded Yodogima, silently, of the great, fathomless unreality lying just beyond, always ahead, alluringly beckoning, yet so disparagingly mute.

"Really, one might think you lost in dreamland," ventured Jokoin, after waiting some seconds, patiently, perhaps, because quite satisfied.

"Not dreaming, but coaxing," replied Esyo, "and were I in Yodogima's place I should do more than that; I should take the matter into my own hands, and answer as reason might dictate."

"Sister!" cried Yodogima. "Would you, truly, deny your God, to satisfy vanity — and know him?"

"I should do the most sensible thing under the cir-

cumstances: you have my deepest sympathy, Yodogima," continued Esyo.

"And, what is more, I have confidence in you," replied Yodogima.

"Well, I suppose, I'm not in it, then," suggested Jokoin.

Neither sister answered; Esyo found it enough to resist expressing some sort of feeling, and Yodogima no longer interested only in the voiceless heavens. pondered the possibilities of Iyeyasu's proposed encounter. Nor could she quite bring herself to trust probability, for had not Hideyoshi once vanquished the great Mondo, outwitted Kemotsu? What if her lover should meet with a worse fate, and that, too, only for her?

"No," said she, to herself; "it must not be."

Then the chance of his winning began to take hold, and her pulses tingled, and the spirit verge spoke in the voice of an ancestor:

"Yes," whispered she, inaudibly, though the fire shone from her eyes as it had a Taira's ages ago.

Esyo paled at the thought: Jokoin bounded up, proposing:

"Shall I shout it aloud, sister?"

"Jokoin!" commanded Esyo; how can you so profane things? Yodogima has not yet invoked understanding: neither flesh nor spirit alone satisfies conscience."

For the moment Yodogima seemingly forgot the terrible test that raged and calmed alternately within.

Facing Esyo, and penetrating with only a glance the thin gauze veiling a sister's underlying purpose, Yodogima said, complacently, though firmly :

“One would think this solely a matter of yours, Esyo. Possibly you had best answer instead, that I may learn also your pleasure; and, perchance, the motive.”

Esyo flushed, and Yodogima read her as written.

“Come closer, Jokoin; I want to feel the warmth and cheer of your presence; it is an inspiration, if not a reason: Esyo is so cold; oh, so unsatisfying, yet also inspiring. Between the two of you I am thrust back upon heart, and shall answer neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no.’ Let them fight, if they will, but tell them, both alike, that they are men: that Yodogima shall let neither one answer to his God for a mistake of hers. It is a woman's province to bear and not to succor man. Good-bye, and when you have need for comfort and less to know then come again; I love you both.”

CHAPTER XII

THE resolving in her own mind of a determination so vital to herself, to her lover, and to others with whom she had to do, had driven Yodogima well nigh unto the brink of distraction. She respected the rights of all, loved as only in truth she could, and held self above the unlettered reach of personal prowess alone; the community had dawned, laid claim to its higher purpose, and held her like a moth lured thither to the candle fire. She would not preach the latter, could not practice the former, hence fell back upon impulse as an only guide.

“Let them fight,” repeated she, when alone and reflecting, “the one ambitious and the other uncertain; I would be neither, and justice will be done — but, is not he my God? What other hope? Forgive me!”

Presently Oyea came to her.

“You did right, Yodogima, and he shall understand, if such be meet; and who can better judge than he? What of the fathers, of tradition, of — ”

“Hush-sh-sh — it seems to me I hear a voice — no, no; it is only he; my God, my Due: I am mindful of — Obedience.”

Upon receipt of her declaration, Iyeyasu forthwith charged Yodogima with unfaithfulness; he believed now that Hideyoshi had found it possible only through her to checkmate his every move to reach and liberate

her, had moved upon him thus prematurely but to satisfy a wavering ambition of hers. Esyo seemed not of sufficient consequence to arouse in him any apprehension from that source; her last protestations appeared to be reasonable enough in view of Jokoin's passive assent, and without looking behind the scenes to discern any better reason further for assuming individual risk, at once set himself about to exact the best terms obtainable.

Love had been the one thing to swerve him, and to disturb the plan that he had evolved earlier in life to build up and round out an existence both useful and to the purpose: he would have no more of it. Hideyoshi, on the other hand, had indulged only as convenience or policy dictated, hence came to look upon virtue as a ruling passion: made it the goal and not his guide.

"You are at liberty to name the terms," urged Hideyoshi, upon Iyeyasu, more in irony than of earnest; no longer doubtful about the latter's attitude, toward Yodogima.

"I want neither women nor wealth; they are alike fatal to government," retorted Iyeyasu, neither heedless nor unready.

"Oh, very well; we shall omit the latter, if you like, but the former are indispensable, I take it; however, one or so more or less doesn't matter much, to me; besides, you may change your mind: Hideyoshi can then the better supply you: my collection is not a mean one —"

"And your mother a good enough security. What say you to that, bickerer?"

"It is agreeable: you can have her, as hostage, of course."

"Hardly for another purpose, as a matter of choice; knowing her son, as I do."

"There are worse mothers — you will not deny her the comfort of a daughter, my sister Saji?"

"I can relieve you as well of her support, if that is any object."

"Thanks. She may not seem extravagant to Iyeyasu. And, you might not dislike, also, Jokoin, my recently adopted daughter?"

"Perhaps I had better take, instead, Esyo, and make an end of it."

"As you like; Hideyoshi is not over nice, or particular, or exacting."

"And Iyeyasu wants nothing not bargained for, and takes no less."

"We shall see," replied Hideyoshi, satisfied with the deal, and anxious to put it to the test without further parley or encumbrance.

Hideyoshi forthwith produced as hostage his mother, Naka, accompanied by her daughter, Saji, apparently to keep her company, and by Esyo, whose presence, already assured, served no better her purpose than Hideyoshi's pleasurable riddance if not her sister Yodogima's more respectful quest. In consideration of the security tendered, Iyeyasu agreed henceforth only to

recognize Hideyoshi as supreme at Kyoto, the capital: Hideyoshi, as usual, made no promises.

Returning to Azuchi, word forthwith spread of Hideyoshi's wonderful success; he had demonstrated the potency of diplomacy as against the cruelties of war — true no one knew quite the terms of their alliance, except they themselves, and seemingly neither one had gained an ostensible advantage, save, perhaps, Iyeyasu; who, as was patent, held the highest possible hostage, yet for what none surmised; or, as events proved, really cared. Nobody's domain had been depleted or augmented, and Iyeyasu's prestige gained by the battle won remained unquestioned; he had never disputed Hideyoshi's supremacy at Kyoto, hence could not be charged with losing anything by recognizing that. On the other hand, Hideyoshi carried with him the odium of defeat in battle, against which the successes of so little known an agency as diplomacy would not have counted for much had he not again looked ahead into the, to him, truly inexhaustible unknown, there discerning still a newer and more effective builder, publicity.

The money, therefore, that Iyeyasu might have exacted as tribute was at once put to a better use, and the women, whose influence he preferred to despise, were not at all slow with experiencing some change of heart, if not of grasping at real opportunity. Yodogima held steadfast to her purpose. Oyea might have been pardoned for a growing conviction that her lord ruled right in any circumstance and that, perhaps,

Yodogima were, after all, a bit ungrateful; but others less disappointing and with more to gain eagerly outbid themselves to do his reverence honor — Grace of Tango, daughter of Akechi Mitsuhide and wife to Hosokawa Tadaoki, cast her jewels into the fund that was forming to bid Hideyoshi enter the capital as a god no less than laurel crowned.

The monks of Negoro were crushed, the South subdued, and the exalted office of Kwambaku (Regent) was conferred upon him, by no less an authority than the mikado himself — Yoshiaki, the deposed shogun, refused to adopt the lowly-born Hideyoshi, as requested, thus enabling him to be declared shogun; Katsutoya still remained at large.

From a huge platform at Kyoto great treasure was distributed, and the barons bended their knees: from far and near they came, women clamored for admission to his court, but there was one who looked deeper than affectation; either upheld or condemned, as inwardly judged; and Hideyoshi, if none other, revered her for it, made her his goddess, and worshipped thence at mercy's will.

"Tell me, Yodogima, what is it I can do to sever the heart-strings that bind you to another? I am not deceived."

"Then you are not a god: I thought you invincible?"

Iyeyasu had settled down to the rebuilding of his fortunes at home, apparently content that he had not been shorn of his estate, had gained the prestige of a victory won at arms — a thing hitherto wholly unre-

nowned for — and that Yodogima no longer appeared to weigh in the scales of duty or ambition; Esyo had doctored up his conscience on that score as best she could, and results proved her no mean attendant; but there was one thing that disturbed him: How could Hideyoshi make so much capital out of so little gained?

After all, had he not underestimated the potency of money as shown in the resolving of publicity, so new, save only to Hideyoshi, yet apparently more vital in the attainment of power to do than was character essential or determinate when once invoked or accepted?

It may have been some dawning eagerness on his part to recoup his loss in that direction, or to take advantage in the future of Hideyoshi's now more than ever patent initiative, or it may have been a growing distrust of or resulting dislike for Esyo, and his vain though unstudied attempt to rid himself of the one by leaning toward another: whatever the cause, Iyeyasu became more and more reconciled to the presence, if not the advances, of Saji: she did make advances, though innocent enough and wholly legitimate on her part. Hideyoshi knew. Nor was any opportunity neglected to let those little surmisings reach and sear the trend of another's confidence, yet Yodogima's love for Iyeyasu flamed on; faith, hope, and charity rounded out the dull monotony of neglected opportunity, making life to her after all worth the living, the striving, and the getting.

"He is mine," whispered she, to herself, repeatedly

pillowing her head upon an untouched but conscious rest.

“By heavens, I’ll make him another’s,” vowed Hideyoshi, as often, yet with no less respect.

All the home provinces and every conceivable approach to the capital now rested securely within the keep of Hideyoshi. The mikado subservient or cowed, and a supervisory authority exercised by himself. His will alone the government, and the nation fired. The populace coerced, neighboring daimyos whipped, and the South in his clutch, there remained only the North as an excuse for putting Iyeyasu further to test and laying threadbare before her own eyes what he believed to be Yodogima’s last prospect there.

Hojo of Odawara had not yet paid his respects to Hideyoshi, nor had Date, still farther to the northward, tendered submission. They were powerful barons, the former fighting his way from insignificance — really from a merchant with a pack on his back — to the lordship of five great provinces, the Kwanto, with a fortified castle at Odawara, intrenched behind mountain gorges at the west and the sea to the southward: a position hitherto held as impregnable as it was desirable. Date fared less well as to defenses, lying largely in the open and depending more upon his neighbor Hojo for protection against the West, but he was none the less rich and perhaps more judicious for that; hence, the greater desired by Hideyoshi.

Realizing that a blow at Hojo meant an equal and

a mutual response from Date, Iyeyasu had good reason under a strained or liberal construction of the terms and conditions of their alliance to respond to Hideyoshi's call for assistance. The two armies moved in concert upon Odawara — Hideyoshi as aggressor and Iyeyasu his support.

It was in the springtime, when roads were open and fain nature leaping forth in heart or bud. They had fought their way over the summit and driven in the nearest outpost: Hojo entrenched himself behind the walls of that castle, seemingly safe without and provisioned within.

Hideyoshi reckoned differently; besides, had other ends to gain. Iyeyasu awaited the advance patiently, but a deeper hold hung dangerously over him, grappled him and snarled him and swayed him, till in the end reason had doubted his entity.

Hojo lay penned in. Date suspicioned his friend's inability to withstand the siege. Iyeyasu and others under Hideyoshi's command bore the delay somewhat indifferently. Hideyoshi, of a sudden, in the face of war, inaugurated the most unheard-of festivities and amid the revelries pursued his own secret purpose.

From the castle to the sea spread the city, with its activities and its apprehensions. To the north and west rose high hills, studded in their lower slopes with the luxury and the content of higher living. Here, at Ishigaki hill, well up on the side and overlooking the castle, in the foreground, Hideyoshi pitched his tent; the army encamped here and there throughout

the city and his communications established there was no need he knew or want devised that must not heed his will.

Wide banquet floors were laid end to end round one side the hill, roofed over with alternating sky and bough: lined up in front of white paper screens, serving as well to frighten the enemy below as to entertain the guests assembling.

Large numbers of various classes, both of nobles and the samurai, were invited—Date among the rest; who, for some reason, known best to himself or to Hideyoshi, secretly came, humbly awaiting the host's still stricter pleasure. Geishas, musicians, players, and favorites were called in thousands; a one hundred days' feast planned; Iyeyasu made an honorary host, and Yodogima brought from Azuchi to do him service.

Other barons had been permitted to invite their wives and their sweethearts—Iyeyasu among them; Saji served in a polite way, if not as a real love—but Hideyoshi, in his higher capacity, either defying custom or succoring freedom, wrote to Oyea granting her only the privilege of delegating Yodogima in her stead.

"As next to you," commanded he, "Yodogima is my favorite: send her along. You shall have me at your side again when I return from the war."

Yodogima came; it was her last chance, and she Oyea's only hope.

Dancing and singing and feasting had waned, the

stars shone bright overhead, and entering Hideyoshi and Yodogima led the way, seating themselves, he at the head with her at his right. Then came Iyeyasu and Saji; who arranged at the motion of Hideyoshi, the former facing Yodogima and the latter himself. Others swarmed in, in like fashion, till the half-moon of gay and happy nobles reached round on either side the hill, properly ranked, beyond the sight or hearing of those honored with higher favors. Low, weird strains issued from the half-hidden platform in front where sat the players, grouped before rising ranks of dancers — then posed and eager, now swaying and relieved — banked against a background of green and shadow. The gods breathed sparingly.

Iyeyasu dared not raise his eyes from the floor. Yodogima calmly awaited some initiative on his part; etiquette bade her bide the pleasure of host or suitor alike. Neither guilt nor remorse weighed at all upon her conscience as it did heavily upon his. There, before him, within reach of his every faculty, as innocent and true, as sweet, as fair, and as appealing as upon the day when he had pledged himself to die for her — the bare thought of having tolerated another, then sitting at his side, deadened intellect and sickened the heart.

“How can I meet her look, return her confidence, knowing as I do now that it is I and not she who is false?” asked he, of himself, till his heart seemed breaking and his mind a mirage.

“Perhaps it is too much, the demand greater than a

human can endure; I should not have come here," reasoned she, equally as reserved, if more unconcernedly.

"Beautiful beyond comparison," appeared to be the verdict of every man or woman within sight of her, and the suspense but quickened their judgment. Hideyoshi gorged satisfied. He had provided every conceivable device, no expense had been spared; for he proved a lavish lover, and Oyea, from motive or pride, had neglected neither art nor attention to relieve and heighten either charm or form; silks embroidered and blended to a thread, laces representing the patience and the labor of an exquisite design or appreciative hand, pearls priceless in cost and emblematic of a disposition which at least the donor had fathomed, all these worn with grace, softened in modesty, and inspired of eyes as keen as confiding, Iyeyasu well might suffer the torments of a troubled conscience — may have asked himself earnestly and regretfully if he had not wronged her.

In her mind no such thought had entered; she believed herself in some way responsible for his apparent neglect. Had she waned in his estimation? Were Saji really more beautiful, still worthier of his admiration, less exacting in her appeal? The blood rushed to Yodogima's face, momentarily tingeing the hitherto untroubled countenance that made her queen. Hideyoshi as quickly came to her relief; he should not see her overtried. Proud, and observant, he would stake his life, make some sort of effort to hew the way that

she might reign, resolve her proper place and prove the man whose worth alone might justify his claim.

"A toast, Yodogima — I am sure that Iyeyasu shall appreciate it — Saji might the better serve Hideyoshi's dull wit," suggested he, by way of relief.

Yodogima raised the cup. She would not disobey, nor would she neglect an opportunity. She believed Iyeyasu true, and held him ready as well. Hideyoshi had granted her the privilege, and made it possible for Iyeyasu to place beyond all doubt the inviolability of their love.

Would he do it? Such a question never entered her mind. Could he? She deemed him incapable of failure. Hideyoshi was as good as his word, had to her proven himself beyond peradventure: perhaps it was something of triumph which prompted the words, it might have been a dawning bit of jealousy inspiring the thought, more likely it were a prospect of truth's obtaining that urged the will to claim its mastery, but whatever the cause, the motive proved none the less discernable. Yodogima faced her lover, not exultantly, yet assuringly, saying:

"While climbing the hill of prosperity, I hope never to meet you."

Iyeyasu's eyes for the first time rose to hers, fairly and unflinchingly. The old love once again possessed him, for the moment flared every torch, forced recognition, and the soul revealed its innermost secret — Hideyoshi waited: possibly the mind waxed hot, but not a hand trembled. Then the message itself began

to claim attention, and directly the puzzling significance of those words dulled and gathered against a waning, startled consciousness till vanity bade Iyeyasu conjure no shameless thought:

"What does she mean?" queried he, of himself, looking from one to another, the while his eyes falling bewildered and helpless before the alternating gaze of Hideyoshi.

Yodogima changed to scarlet, then whitened; she had surrendered life itself to recall the words, perhaps too thoughtlessly spoken.

Was it charity, or revenge, that prompted Hideyoshi?

"Coming down," suggested he, to Iyeyasu, no doubt triumphantly, but none the less mercifully — putting into his mouth the words that he had floundered so bitterly to command or riddle.

Shame overcame any better impulse, and turning upon his adversary, Iyeyasu half whined, half scowled:

"Perhaps you yourself had best drink the toast."

"To-morrow, I may; or, perchance, it shall not be until the next day; thank you," replied Hideyoshi, not the least perturbed.

CHAPTER XIII

ALL the powers of earth could not have tried the princess more; she realized now that she had, out of zeal, overtaxed Iyeyasu, and in that opened the way for Hideyoshi perhaps successfully to pit a wit against her lover's returning steadfastness.

"Oh, it isn't much, after all, and — I can propose another," stammered she, though composedly, in some vain way to stem the tide and save still the man she adored; just why, she could not tell nor would others surmise.

The suggestion fell cold upon Iyeyasu's now troubled conviction; he had been outdone by a rival: there was not the slightest doubt about that in his mind; Iyeyasu respected aptness, even though himself slow to act. Nor was he longer in doubt as to Yodogima's constancy or love; one glance had convinced him beyond recalling, and he could not have envied, for he had often said that the secret of happiness lies in kindly feeling. Then what was it that prompted him quickly to answer:

"Not to-day, but to-morrow?"

"As the princess likes," retorted Hideyoshi, his admiration growing with quest and confidence.

"More — it is a guest's pleasure," commanded she, replacing the cup and glancing at Hideyoshi, without

so much as disturbing a visitor or confusing their host.

That evening was thence passed without further incident, save an apparently growing discomfiture on Iyeyasu's part and the corresponding rise in spirit of Hideyoshi; who not deigning to parley with Yodogima — he took her at her word, and prided himself in doing so — began resolutely further to carry out and not to forestall. Yodogima had done her part, and well: there seemed nothing more that she could or would do to save a waiting lover; she had made it possible for him to claim her, and to drink the draught that Hideyoshi himself should not have questioned, and he had failed to do either — might be as easily duped into a more fatal blunder, made the scapegoat of his own waiting or incapacity, or both, and the princess at once raised above his further consideration.

Thus Hideyoshi planned and Iyeyasu dallied, perhaps dreamed, and marvelled the audacity, perchance effect, with which Yodogima commanded, possibly ordered. The following day, however, clouded over and Date and Hideyoshi counselled and bantered till early evening, when they stood on the latter's suggestively improvised ramparts cogitating the plight of Hojo farther down in the foreground.

"You are the greater man," plead Date, no longer doubtful of Hideyoshi's resources or motive, "and I am ready to surrender my lands and do you service."

"Ah; then you shall know what it is to toast a man like Hideyoshi; to-night you shall sit next to me; and,

by the way, face the smartest woman in these parts: look you well that your tongue neither outruns nor belies the manner due or occasion expected."

At table Date, true to conviction and in consonance better with propriety, proposed the health of Hideyoshi, their duly lord and henceforth recognized master.

Flushing scarlet, Yodogima barely touched the cup that stood filled for another purpose; it seemed to her that Iyeyasu, who now sat at her side, must intercede, should realize that opportunity were fast slipping away: he only whitened, then drank the liquor as prudence dictated.

Hideyoshi smiled, and turning to Date attempted their present relief by suggesting, bluntly:

"The princess reserves discreetly her response till occasion more pleasantly affords; Iyeyasu may yet drink with a better color, if not more grace."

The next day, in consequence, brought with it a train of circumstances as swift as it had been unexpected — to all except, perhaps, Hideyoshi. Matsuda, Hojo's main reliance, had succumbed, not to valor but to gold, and that night his master's head graced a place at table — opposite to Iyeyasu: who now, once more, faced at greater distance Yodogima, but entertained as before, close at hand, Saji, in whom the now startled and cringing daimyo from Mikawa may have found some little consolation, if not a rising prospect.

"Let us now listen to Saji; it may prove to be not only her fair due, but our most agreeable opportunity,"

commanded Hideyoshi, in great liberality, as it appeared to others, yet with a hidden earnestness that neither Yodogima nor Iyeyasu mistook.

Saji did as bid; it seemed quite immaterial to her: all the heart that God had really given her had long ago been drilled or tooled away, for Hideyoshi believed in duty — ruled or reasoned to preach and practice down or up as convenience less necessity required. Iyeyasu turned red.

A growing, pitiless consciousness began to take hold on Yodogima's hitherto buoyant, confiding trust. The very mat on which the princess sat seemed sinking or rising as the moments flew or lingered. Alternating flashes left her undetermined. Heaven or worse had been a relief: Hideyoshi angered for once, and for the first time looked his rival straight in the face. Iyeyasu's eyes fell to the significant fright across the table. Yodogima's look then had strengthened him, but he dare not meet her gaze.

"Saji, Saji," mumbled he, half conscious, half appealingly.

She only smiled, but the dead lips of Hojo moved him:

"My wife, gentlemen, my wife!"

Yodogima had been spared the sight of Hideyoshi's gruesome lesson: likewise she had been denied its consolation; yet she could believe Iyeyasu's vain resolution no less than final, if not voluntary. And it may have been so. Like examples had been flaunted in the face of others less capable or worthy, had been used time

and again by men more considerate, if as determined, but never before might the charge of cruelty be laid at the door of Hideyoshi; who had suffered Shibata the right of honorable demise, spared Shimadzu the loss of his ancestral name, and let Iyeyasu more than once slip any fate that he might have chosen, still Hojo's head must adorn a sorrowful plight.

And why?

The princess did not stop to inquire; she knew only that she had suffered perhaps at their expense or for their betterment, and the very heavens above seemed bereft — earth had done its worst, the humanities failed, all their Gods and Buddhas and Christs promised relief only in death — save a certain star, that seemed the brighter in its loneliness: ideality proffered life.

Thereafter Hideyoshi summoned Iyeyasu to the top of a certain hill overlooking the fortress, the city, and the country around.

"You perceive," suggested the former, "that the Kwanto is mine."

"Y-e-s," stuttered Iyeyasu, his mind far distant.

"You know that I am master, hereabouts, I take it?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall give you these provinces, in consideration of — your services."

"What luck!"

"Where will you live?" inquired Hideyoshi, still more suggestively.

Iyeyasu again hesitated. He had set Yodogima

aside and accepted Saji out of respect for a well-grounded belief, had invoked self-denial to the point of distraction, and bought peace at the cost of manhood, but to surrender a birthright and abandon every defense seemed more than he could do, even in the face of rigid necessity. This man then would rule and not ruin. Had Yodogima judged him more accurately than he had done? Would she succeed? Pride urged him now, forced the aggressive, hence prompted him to answer:

“At Odawāra.”

“No. I know a place, farther away, called Yedo (Tokio). There is where you shall live.”

“Very well, my lord,” replied Iyeyasu, determined now, whereas before he had provokingly waited.

CHAPTER XIV

IN the meantime there had developed within the ranks, and outside as well, no inconsiderable speculation as to what further to expect. Hitherto Hideyoshi had found ample employment for all his talents; from the beginning it had been one constant, absorbing grind, but now that all the barons worth the while had been subdued, the last man who could in any manner check or hinder him apparently disposed with, he more restless than ever, Hojo made an example of, and Yodogima undoubtedly his keep, they might well conjecture.

Already some ugly rumors had started, and circulated (Esyō came and went at leisure), causing Yodogima to ponder, no less made the master furious.

"Eigh? A subordinate question his superior? Crucify the culprit," commanded he, intending quite another example.

"No," interposed Yodogima, complacently.

"Well," replied Hideyoshi, to the officer, after a moment's reflection, "as the villain did not utter the speech in my presence you may instead cut off his head."

"No," repeated Yodogima, more positively.

"Ah," ventured Hideyoshi, vainly cogitating some sort of excuse, "seeing he is a samurai, you had better tell him to commit hirikara."

"No," commanded Yodogima, now wholly conscious.

"Promote him, then, for having done me a service," directed he, still set upon some voice in the matter.

"Not you, but me," retorted Yodogima, now fully determined upon her part.

"Why you; I am master, am I not?"

"Not of me; and, I am going to see that you prove yourself something more than a head-chopper."

"You have heard?"

"Yes; Esyo just now told me all about it."

"Women will talk," sighed Hideyoshi, mindful of a hundred battle fields, and no one woman that he had ever conquered.

"And I'll show you that they can do more," threatened she, without a change to suggest an advantage.

Yodogima had taken desperate chances in calling Hideyoshi to account as done, but she had studied him well and believed herself capable — not that she might have need to combat any mean advantage; but gossip, vain assumption, had compelled now the assertion and maintenance of a womanhood; which otherwise had not been questioned.

Hitherto Hideyoshi had been held as interested only in the affairs of men, wholly absorbed with the making and unmaking of fortune or fortunes so distant and neglectful of any influence that women might bring to bear that none had essayed to do more than serve and chatter for centuries; but now, that he had so overstepped the bounds of conventional warfare as to indulge effeminate pastimes and cringe in the presence

of a princess, he himself might be excused and she most surely condemned.

Iyeyasu, even, who knew in his own heart, looked upon Yodogima's heroic stand as more the result of sustained loyalty than innate purity.

"And that loyalty will preserve her, as self-denial is to be the making of me," muttered he, to himself, as the preparations for his submissive removal progressed: that, from a rich and populous estate, where men had learned to love and respect him from childhood, would sacrifice their lives and their energies to defend him, to a new, and a strange, and an isolated keep, where disorder, dissatisfaction, and crude and crumbling walls abounded: that, too, with only a body-guard, his Saji, and the vain, if not unscrupulous, Esyo to accompany him.

And as the little straggling band marched away, harboring its jealousies, it may be revenge, certainly its ambitions, Yodogima turned from them in compassion — her heart seemed breaking, but duty rallied to the call of pride, and she forgave him, perchance tried to forget.

Esyo could not be so easily dismissed; her parting words had lingered, now roused in Yodogima to the full some comprehension of what her father meant in turning her out threateningly in the company of two seemingly lovable and harmless sisters. His guidance and protection had been a world to her now, that she had, as she alone believed, reaped the fullest measure of bitterness, wherein God has endowed that man shall

covet. Charms had been easily flung at them, Esyo's hinted admonition seized upon with avidity, and the body sacrificed upon the altar of rapacity, but the spirit rebelled and held her fast in its higher reach.

"Perhaps, Yodogima, the bushida might afford you, as it did our father, some really honorable means."

Those words welled up and rimmed over in Yodogima's heart, as molten lava heaves and lips and inflows at the crater's edge. Esyo, a sister, had denounced her, but something within, a promise somewhere, sustained her, roused her to a deeper, broader sense of duty than she could conjure forth of self-effacement. Then Jokoin came, and only her presence had made it seem once more as if earth truly held some fair portion, but her counsel, too, seemed empty, even blasphemous.

"Christ is our redeemer; He died to save us; I am confessed; hallelujah!" shouted Jokoin, happy and careless, if unmindful.

"Sister! You shock me. Have you forgotten our father?"

"Oh, he's alright; he didn't know; the new religion takes 'em all. Repent and be saved; quarrel and separate; divorce and — do you know, they allow man, big men, only one wife at a time; firstary, secondary, or multipary? That's something!"

"I do believe you are losing your mind, Jokoin."

"That's nothing; go to Bungo; they're half daffy there; and, they say, Hideyoshi, himself, would have accepted Christianity were it not for giving up the

idea of more wives than one. I guess, though, he's a stickler on that — perhaps, come to think, you may know better than I?"

"I know my own mind; and that is more than it would seem — there, Jokoin; it is enough; let us be sisters — I presume there is nothing against that, in your religion?"

"Really, I haven't inquired: the priests will know — however, we might just sort of hang out that way; it's an elastic affair, this Christian religion, whatever else."

Withal her newfangled notions and queer mannerisms, Yodogima found this little sister most stimulating and satisfying to know and to cling to, however trying or unreasonable. Each, it is true, had an ideal of her own, quite as distinct and appealing to its possessor, as Esyo's had been to her, yet neither one had stooped to attain, nor would she. Jokoin had become a Christian because it pleased her to do so: its revelation had resolved more the humorous than serious, the human and not the divine. A half century of struggle and martyrdom had proven, if anything, in their minds, that the Christian church, like all others, were but a means to an end: that God alone is supreme — substitution or addition or usurpation a dangerous, designed, fleeting makeshift.

All these creeds had been threshed out in competition and with vengeance — none had spared life or property — and yet it seemed to Yodogima that she must be saved: saved in accordance with precepts

established and of a danger that to her were more than death or salvation, or both, however atoned or attuned. She must live, she must do, and in that attain: in her prayer she asked for power and not for ransom.

The whole camp now enlivened with bustle and drive; each of the captains had been assigned his portion or placed most advantageously, in their distributions and allotments, and great preparations were making for the leave-taking — some heart-rending, others in good cheer. Most of Hideyoshi's leaders shared Iyeyasu's former possessions, but Gamo Ujisata, one of Jokoin's recently ardent admirers — Takiyama had been sooner banished to Kaga — without leave or let, on her part, was set down at Aizu, in the cold far north.

"Never mind, Jokoin," promised Hideyoshi, upon her remonstrance; "you shall have left Ishida, and, perchance, another, or some others, I fear too much a mask for hypocrisy: with them, you should be able to make out, if not capture the empire."

"What a bunch!" replied Jokoin, sorely abashed.

"Well, then, suppose you include your humble — ahem!"

"An old dried-up man like you? I had rather try —"

"Kyogoku?"

"Yes; smart Alex; he has left a bit of ginger, if not as much audacity as — some others."

"Oho, aha; I can, perhaps, also, place him."

“Not on your life.”

“I wonder.”

“I don’t; I’ve a sister.”

“So, so; and two of them. It’s a pretty nest or nests, or something they build — I’m building. Hideyoshi! Whipped every man in Japan, that’s worth the trouble, and three will-o’-the-wisps would set up house-keeping on results. Esyo denies me, Jokoin defies me, and Yodogima — you can go, young lady; you and I couldn’t quarrel, should we try; but, remember, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush — I wonder, is Yodogima in a better mood?”

“Don’t do so much wondering. Just try your luck. You ought to know how.”

“I do; I do; I’ll vow, you’ve made a new man of me.”

“And you’ve made me happy. What’s the use — the priests: the exiles — ”

“There, now; run along; love and law — edicts must be obeyed. Hang the villains; the bonzes were a blessing; treachery is damnation!”

Jokoin left him, standing in a rage; she knew very well that he was then on the way to plead his own cause in very different terms, if not with less success than she had met in a manner so unexpected and unthought. Two things, however, were accomplished in that short, saucy, and withal agreeable conversation; the kwambaku had been fairly warned as to Yodogima’s real temper, and he himself wrought into the

proper humor for his contemplated meeting: the fun of taunting, had recompensed Jokoin.

"I'll have this thing settled, once and for all," muttered Hideyoshi, as Jokoin disappeared behind a moving cavalcade and he had turned to climb the hill where Yodogima marvelled and fretted the tardiness of his appearance.

An old yashiki (mansion) afforded the princess temporary quarters farther up on the hillside and away from the hurry-skurry of the camp below. It was warm and restful, with a breeze blowing gently inland from the ruffled bay in front and the seething ocean beyond. Yodogima sat at the veranda's edge, high upon the stone-abutting wall that terraced here and there the hill's sharp incline or served as foundation to some house perched high in air. The skies were clear, and now and then a raven hawked his weird cry aloft the stilled hamlets in front or clusters of seagull reeled and fed in the distance.

No clouds of smoke darkened the outlook or blackened these mats. Clanging bells and grinding wheels there were none to awaken anxiety and shatter nerves. The very exigencies of life found expression through its subtler entities and not a sordid instinct lagged or threatened faint regeneration. Man loved as always, but gold for the sake of gold, greed that he might gorge, or the dull clashing of horns had long ago found their rest alongside of other tried-out and found wanting thrills in easy energies. The star beautiful had raised him to newer, grander speculation than the

things of earth conjured or the hope of forgiveness promised. For every reach attained there must be some effort put forward: for each sin committed an atonement. Self pretending, by others accepted, saviors and martyrs there had been many, but as time went on one after another of these conjectured blessings or blind experiments had been swept aside or lost in the wake of a constantly progressive manhood, at times cast high upon the billow's crest, again sunken low into the troughs of despair, yet always guided by a light that shone singly ahead, against whose halo no discordant voice had as believed dimmed or dulled the truer harmonies of an eternal, perfectly consistent God.

Yodogima looked aloft and all around. Peace on earth and good-will toward men whispered from every nook and cranny. The birds sang it, the flowers smelled it, the world looked consistent, but the heart discerned a discordant note. Were death heaven's only beginning, life's sole end? No, no; it must not be, for I see with closed eyes, hear with muffled ears, feel without the sense of touch a Kami, whose works neither begin with worlds nor end in man; an illumination extending from heaven unto earth. There is no subtler hold than that we know; the things we see are but the shades of reality. Truth faintly lives apart and is infinite.

Sitting there enveloped, within a world as distinct as sublime, as far above earth as its canopy is broad, the mystic spell touched and warmed her as though

its complement were at hand. The province of sex fastened upon her as the sun's rays congeal and expand with each unhindered contact: communing, Yodogima had been less than human, had worse than mocked His divinest precept, were the bread and wine passed untasted.

Hideyoshi stood over, the world exacted its decrees, and conformity offered her an only excuse:

"I hear you," replied she, "am conscious of my obligations, and would not defy that is. Take me as I am. I'll serve you if Kami commands; let the law have its way, and make me what you like: in the name of all that has gone before and that is to be, let me and do you save, too, the honor of woman."

That night the two-lipped cup once more went round — its never-ending course — and Yodogima became in law as she was in fact first of consequence at Hideyoshi's court.

And if these things were inevitable, if there remained at Azuchi a soul forlorn and perchance bitter, perhaps welling up a still more ruthless indisposition, and if the ideal toward which a hapless, helpless woman had bent her every energy, sacrificed the body to preserve a soul, were attained — if all this had resulted in fact, there yet remained among them one in whose heart there lingered not only a burning, compelling sense of duty, but as well an abiding faith in truth.

Yodogima had not surrendered the spirit, nor had

she submitted in pride, or bowed to falsehood, hate, or weakness — to her the world seemed as sweet and as wholesome as the battle had been swift or exacting.

Thence life portended a fullness that hitherto had been a dream.

CHAPTER XV

THE great sacrifice that Yodogima made only strengthened Hideyoshi's respect for her, whetted the appetite to a keener appreciation of the virtues underlying righteous generation. Iyeyasu had surrendered the heart to save his neck; no such thing as pretence or any amount of subterfuge could deceive the inner workings of an understanding wrought in the light of penetration like Hideyoshi's. Yodogima had reserved the heart, sacrificing personal predisposition only that she might serve fairly the honor of an under-sex — she had not submitted through compulsion or fear of any man; the kwambaku knew that, if others did not, and the very consciousness of it made him what no earthly power could have done.

“Such generosity,” said he, to Oyea, in answer to her questioning, “cannot be requited so easily; there must be a place set apart for them; perhaps among the stars, and such as you and I can best attain our peace in humbler ways — reverence has withstood the storm of ages.”

“But are not the gods self-asserted?”

“Well, yes; I once thought so, perhaps do yet; but self-assertion, not grounded upon self-denial, may prove an empty blessing — as it has with me. Would you profit by example, then look; even Hideyoshi has found it meet that we reason together; who declares

himself wiser than the humblest is in truth an ass; deception cannot weather the test of time."

They were sitting in the dusk, midway between day and night, and arising, Hideyoshi approached the family shrine — it seemed empty and so unlike the needs of distinction, yet the kwambaku had, upon his return from Odawara, stopped at Nakamura and done reverence to his long buried but sadly neglected parents. Nor had Nita (a first, but intractable, therefore divorced, wife) been passed by without some little recognition — possibly as an encouragement to this one, Oyea, in this her most trying need.

"What of night following the day?" asked he, of her, lighting one, then the other of five carefully selected and wistfully named sticks of incense for her to sniff and guess or call as pleased her most and fitted best his mood.

"That a sun may rise to outshine another," retorted she, wholly mindful of her own situation, if not his method.

"You say rightly, Oyea, and woe be unto him or her who would deny or abuse the virtue of sniffing; only through a son can man attain heaven."

Hideyoshi's words pained Oyea; she had trusted him, served dutifully, and conformed to the requirements of the age, only to be told in the end that there could be no salvation for her — the stork had withheld her lord's divinest blessing.

Oyea looked round at the scant necessities with which all her life she had been making both ends

meet that he, her husband, should lack no aid within her rendering to help him onward toward the goal she, too, believed him most worthy to hold. Were she to receive now, at the bidding of charm, or the failure of chance, only the bare habiliments of respectable doing? She had forfeited at marriage better opportunity, suffered the finger of scorn more than once, upheld patiently the laws of the land and bowed reverently before the gods of time, and yet no one had awakened within her a light revealing more than earth's proffered bounty. And if the bitter must be hers, why not as well partake of the sweets?

The very thought for the moment raised her from lowest despondency to highest anticipation. Rising to her feet the world seemed rejuvenated with a thought as glorious as new — Hideyoshi lay stretched upon the matting, snoring away fonder dreams than she had dared conceive.

The cold sweat oozed in beads at her forehead.

Here, contentedly and at her mercy, rested in peace and expectation the one who could at will and without retribution give or take her happiness. Then conscience rushed to the fore, and Oyea stood more pitifully than purpose had made her. Calmly surveying the relaxed features in whose justness had been for a lifetime her only faith, the at last enraged wife unwittingly loosed her would-be grasp in the face of another vision which as incomprehensibly rose to stay her hand.

“Woman!” snarled she, “the curse of her kind, and

a vexation always. I'll don another dress : therein lies my only recompense."

After a while Hideyoshi arose, and rubbing his eyes, asked doubtfully:

"Did I sleep, Oyea?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then it was a dream: I would that it were real."

"For that, it may be none the less."

The great man looked up, puzzled though wilful. He could, nor did, comprehend that she, too, might have dreamed, marvelled the penalties exacted of rightful living, and evolved a retribution, if less human, then the more in keeping with an instinct born of subtler virtues.

"You shall not deny me, Oyea?" plead he, half doubtful of the motive, if altogether innocent of her intentions.

"Deny you? Of what? Yodogima?"

"No. A son."

"Aye, aye, my lord. A higher authority than mine denies you that."

"There is none higher. You are my lawful wife."

"Fie on you! We but declare, while impotency reigns. My faith is in virtue."

"Then I'll not trust you — though the bonzes had served better, your purpose, than these self-called priests: who preach to prey while their victims pray but 'peach.' I once had confidence in you: I never had any in them."

"What of priests and bonzes, you might yet better

charge a blessing to the care of one whose influence nor beauty stands anyone in hand or harm: though only a wife, I should serve no less an encouragement."

"Rickety, rickety, fiddlede, fiddlede; a woman is a woman, her tongue an appendage. Therein the certainty of wagging. Both jealousy and consistency may be jewels, superb and allusive, but each in a tiara. I'll let you have it out in Azuchi; Yodogima is already at Ozaka: between creeds, or independently, there may yet formulate a crown. See you that your conduct is no less attuned than her estimate deserves; I have business at the capital."

Taking his departure forthwith, Oyea bowed low and reverently — not so much, perhaps, now, out of respect for a husband alone, or for anything he had done personally to deserve as much, but more as a result of some inner quality or natural-born trait that abuse could not eradicate or dull even into vain misapprehension. Oyea was of better stock than Hideyoshi: better insofar as tradition or probability had seen fit to record and make known, yet looking out upon the world in which she lived, and reflecting the obligations imposed by a social organization with which it seemed that she had had so little to do, a growing sense of something wanting burned the harder into her now softeningly bewildered consciousness. Had she accused him wrongly? Might it be, after all, verily some shortcoming of her own which had for so long a time denied to him an inalienable right? And what of society?

Her religion — that one handed down from an ancestry antedating all creeds, surmounting any profession — had provided the means of escaping just such a failure as she, by virtue of feeling as pitted against reason, had suffered; though as religiously, if not as rigorously, courted. And why had she done so?

The only reason that she could fairly call to mind was that the priests had told her differently; that a dawning trust in Christ was at that very moment sapping the only foundation that she may have had for a belief; that the doctrines of a new church were separating her forever and helplessly from all that had been dear and possible to her and hers — and, asked she, of herself, and her God:

“For what?”

Oyea awaited patiently some response from this newly proclaimed Savior, whom the priests had set over her and home — no other voice than conscience answered; and therein she conjured many thoughts, divined a reason for things, and fell hopelessly at the shrine of an uncontrollable, undenying, born-unto impulse. Yodogima possessed an attraction, Kami in his wisdom had equated life and death, and no man's blood or woman's want could save a soul or regenerate an unregenerate.

Then she marvelled the seeming vanity of all that is more than crude, and out of the black there rushed the possible saving grace of man's own involution —

both prayer and confession had failed to wrest her from worse than perdition.

“That woman enjoy my husband’s favor, in a castle of her own, because she is more than I? Huh! I’ll see her humbled.”

“Otohi?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Fetch the smelling-salts, and my vanity case. Further, I shall not require your service, perhaps, till the sun is risen — at Ozaka.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE castle at Ozaka now stood in the main finished, and with Yodogima's occupancy and the kwambaku's favor at once sprang into prominence; not only as a strategic point of first importance, but as the very seat of empire socially, possibly politically, rivaling in all respects, if not eclipsing, Kyoto, the capital and ruling post since the days of Kwammu, some eight hundred years before.

This tendency on the part of the barons, to centralize all things at the new seat of power, did not meet with Hideyoshi's broader views; he was democratic at heart, and beside a better judgment may have preferred "toadyism," if such there must be, at long range. He had fought his way into the foremost rank, not to tear down existing institutions or to substitute one man for another in authority or to profit personally at the expense of others: he would rise, no doubt to a heavenly sphere, but in that should not disturb earthly conditions — it were the individual, refractory and crude, who must be thrashed into peaceful, tolerant attitudes — would carve out a new place or adapt himself to an old one, enabling direction and enforcement in a manner at once effective and for the betterment of all mankind. A laudable thought, perhaps, and with an organization in keeping with his power to subjugate Hideyoshi might have become in

truth a god — self-made, self-standing, and self-perpetuating: as he no doubt planned and fairly believed within the doing of man.

Purposing to distribute and maintain separately these greater divisions of human interest and essential development, the kwambaku had as wisely or unwisely sent Iyeyasu into the newer regions at Tokyo, hoping to transfer as far as possible from their capital, not only a possible rival, but the larger business activities of the empire; he had left the mikado, his court and the kuge (royalty) at Kyoto, best fitted as he believed by environment and tradition to perpetuate authority on the one hand and engender respect on the other; with religion or society in the narrower sense he had little to do and much less concern: both seemed essential or vital to priest or layman, nobleman or peasant alike, hence the better adapted without seat or prestige to encourage, less deny; his own fortress he believed well established at Ozaka.

Here he could look out, at close range, upon the best that a nation had evolved or the worst suffered; wealth and poverty were alike interesting and incumbent questions. Strength within and weakness without those walls afforded a contrast deep in purport. To the southward, not far distant, lay Nara, treasured home of the beautiful in art as well as the profound of learning. Kyoto, the capital, no farther away, sheltered the revered and the dignified in statesmanship and authority. The trader's mart and the pro-

ducer's seat, least tasteful to him, had been transported and established farthest off: intrusted to hands that he believed best fitted for that and no other, Hideyoshi sought to set himself down to the realization of a larger desire, that other faith, the reincarnation, an inter-perpetuation and glorification of self and self alone.

"You are my only hope, Yodogima. Let faithfulness adjust itself not to the exigencies of mean occasion, but give me a son; the golden thread must be stranded unbroken. Ishida shall serve, and the captains honor; the wealth and the fashion and the culture of all men henceforth bows at your bidding."

"Do not tempt me, my lord; I should rather trust Kami; the glitter but disheartens me: in prayer I have faith."

"I would deny you nothing: only bear me a son."

"Then grant me fair. Remove these fawning, cringing courtiers, and bide you here; I am only human."

"Perhaps more. Yet I'll vow you safe in hands I know — Ishida never yet played me false. Come; out with it; who is there, that you prefer? Hideyoshi may wax blind, when occasion requires, but he need not for that be treated as dumb — to the workings of conscience or fancy. My wife loves: is her husband but a scapegoat?"

"It may be true, and she none the less abused thus accused. Take this man Ishida from the castle, and keep him without. Perhaps then you shall know that a woman may love and yet discern, if not command.

I am your wife, and shall serve you as decreed; a chance is all that I shall ask or that you may require."

Ashamed of his conduct and mortified over anxiety, Hideyoshi did not as bid, but left the castle with his suit, including the reluctant Ishida; who by long years of faithful attendance had so ingratiated himself — designing accordingly — that the kwambaku had already been put to straits upon more than one occasion to find a real or plausible excuse for keeping the fellow longer in his service. Nor was Yodogima altogether alone in her estimation of him; many of the kwambaku's oldest and most trusted friends had suspected the wily body-servant's good faith, in fact, at this early day mistrusted ulterior motives and cross purposes should the master accidentally or otherwise happen to die.

The sudden departure, therefore, of Hideyoshi, seemingly miffed and more than ever under the influence of Ishida, who grew thereby less in favor among the captains, roused some of them to greater concern, if not about somebody's sanity, then as to their own welfare.

Among these grizzled or enthusiastic warriors and supporters none took to heart more than Kuroda the matter of Hideyoshi's seeming change; the two had grown up together, from early days, the one as retainer, the other his aid, and they loved each other as only men similarly situated and suited can love. Ishida, however, had poisoned the elder, and with his establishment at Fushima — selected on account of

its isolation yet accessibility — the veteran fighter, Kuroda, was at last turned from the door.

“It is a terrible blow, Yodogima, to be torn from a lifelong friendship,” said he, to her, shortly afterward, while sitting in the fall of evening, at the Ozaka castle, overlooking the vast throngs around, who came and went with less attending joy or sorrow, “and Ishida is to blame. Yet I cannot criticise your resolve; you have fought a noble battle, my dear child: you did right, and there isn’t a man worth his while in Hideyoshi’s service but would stand by you to the last — I wonder; has the kwambaku lost his mind?”

“No. He has, though, lost confidence in me,” replied Yodogima, suppressing with difficulty the tears fast rising in her downcast eyes.

“Impossible!”

“It is true.”

“Then Ishida has done more than play the traitor; he has villified a good woman: more, he has sought to ruin a worthy wife. I swear it, he shall rue the day.”

In all these years Yodogima had done everything in her power to live the life of a faithful, dutiful, and appreciative wife — such as the law and the pleasure of man had enforced. No longer might she question the act, or consult morals; she had chosen to abide the sterner edicts of a social organism utterly beyond the revision or prevision of any one individual, much less a woman: who had neither voice nor hand in the making, nor could suggest its undoing. Yet the closer the reality the more transcendent became her one

inspiration. The star that had guided her from infancy shone the brighter for the gloom; that enshrouded a heart, in which there lived a conscience: the dictates of which had long ago flung her upon the mercies of a less grinding, more tolerant fate.

"I will be true to my Kami, though declared false by all the creeds of all the gods," promised she, to herself, long after the grey-haired Kuroda had gone: when the stars had inspired that larger comprehension than of things we think we know.

The night brought, too, its peace of rest, and on the morrow Yodogima awakened to a juster realization of affairs close at hand; swift couriers brought tidings of a great change at the seat of authority, Fushima — lately established by Hideyoshi as his own official residence, but just now turned over to Hidetsugu, his nephew, whom he had adopted and made kwam-baku, he himself assuming the title of Taiko.

Scorn, therefore, began, presently, to take the place of due consideration; rumor travelled fast, and the master's change of title, and the adoption of an heir, soon raised the question of failure: Yodogima was now charged with vilest remission, and had not resignation sooner prepared the way she, too, must have fallen before the rank avalanche of duller ingratitude than follows in the wake of blind assumption.

The nation had been wronged, and the man who had placed his trust in her, abused: it devolved upon her and none other to right the grievous evil that had apparently been accepted as final.

"What in His name can I do?" begged and plead the princess, in the only way that she knew.

Then Oyea stealthily came to Ozaka, advising and befriending.

The older of the two wives did not threaten; she had learned by experience and conversion that the more effective course lay in subtler means, perhaps in truth.

"Why don't you visit Hiyeisan? There is a temple there —"

"I thought you had turned Christian?" interceded Yodogima, thoughtlessly.

"So I have; but you may need not some forgiveness; circumstance no sooner governs than fulfilment predicates — the act, if not our meed. What matter how or where we pray and do, when wrought in heaven's likening span? It is the consequence, and not its revelation, that makes duty paramount. Therefore, seek you, who have only to choose; it is for such as I to fashion, and when this particular god shall have served you as he never did me, why, then, you, too, may have occasion to flit and none to reason. I tell you there are as many ways as creeds, or less, and I'd try them out, all of them, though not so beautiful."

Yodogima laughed outright in spite of conditions:

"What in heaven's name has beauty to do with religion?"

"My dear Yodogima; it has everything to do with it; as it has to do with all things and everybody, the gods, their churches, and our bounties included. Do

you suppose, for a minute, that I should be here, to-day, were it not for you? And it's a part of my religion to serve and trust that trust may serve."

"How kind!"

"You won't fail me, will you, Yodogima?"

"I'll think about it; I do not wish to be narrow, or — outwitted."

An unlooked-for restlessness appeared to have swept into the land; and all the barons and captains grew uneasy with inaction or impatient of conditions. To Yodogima it seemed that in some way she alone were responsible for the cause, if not the effect, of such unheard-of conditions. Hideyoshi knew better; and smarting with shame or repenting of foolhardiness turned again toward Ozaka.

No such joy had come to Yodogima since the day Iyeyasu promised his love and protection. While Oyea had never broken faith, and still professed friendship, the younger wife had long ago amply discovered the reason, and knew fairly in her own heart that once a wife in fact no husband might share his love or respect or favor without breaking the tenderer thread, no matter what the demands or the edicts of society and of law, or both. Whether for good or for ill there could be no compromise where an affinity had laid its hand upon that and that alone vital, if not sacred, unto itself. The older wife's interest had resolved only the shielding of an inner vanity, as Hideyoshi's accusations laid bare the outward appearance of that same inborn, unmanageable tendency: call it

by what name one might, govern as the world should see fit, it were yet a force no less determinate of man than absolute in the revelation of God.

"I did you a very great wrong," began Hideyoshi, by way of remission, as Yodogima and he strolled away, through the bramble, at the hillside, toward the lower castle wall; "and, as you see, in recognition of your superior trust and my acknowledged duty, I have willingly left Ishida behind. What more would you have me do, lady patience?"

"Love me, truly love me, my lord; then, also, you might, sometimes, address me, as Yodogima — only Yodogima, if no more."

"And, will you, too, call me Hideyoshi?"

Yodogima bowed low, and the scarlet rushed to her face. The soft, warm air of early spring fanned the flame, and Hideyoshi felt as never before the glow and the warmth of rising confidence. An image carved in stone of the good and the great stood near at their side and returning the cherished salutation of that one higher held our taiko for the first time in his life approached this in some way fashioned god who had for many thousand or more years held and swayed the hearts of a nation so deep-grounded and far-seeing that no truth revealed or possibility conjectured had escaped their discerning, eager quest for that we wish were what we would it were. And approaching, he did the one thing that really distinguishes man and establishes for him a world apart.

Hideyoshi prayed; and Yodogima marvelled the force of an environment.

All her prayers had arisen within the solicitude of tried-out conviction, a consciousness fraught with distrust in everything not wholly proven or self-satisfying, were invoked of a Being that she knew, One standing revealed in the light of His beneficence, not some unknown but hoped-for God, conjured as the result of a longing on her part to escape the heartless dark of earth's vain, momentary alternations. Follow that beacon — above the need or beneath the power of faith — she would; there could be no doubt in her mind as to His supremacy, Its ultimatum; but might she not for that, without overstepping the borders of a bidden track, nor any the less losing sight of her own true inspiration, might she not, in her flight toward an unalterably preconceived and self-attainable end so govern her steps that no conflict ensue with others bent on no less holy, yet more uncertain, grounds?

The stars seemed whirling in space measured and adjusted to the balance of a perfect equilibrium; all the elements, no matter whether it be the rushing of the winds, or the rumblings of an avalanche, or the belching forth of fire and the downpourings of waters from heaven upon earth, each found in due time and with perfect accord its own properly allotted place or plan; the soul and the body lived their destined duality with no more positive dissilation than death itself scarce renders; the negative forces of earth and eternity, heaven or oblivion, were but the positive's own

postulate, working out its never-ending, all-propelling grind toward an essential individuality, supreme and overreaching, whether wrought in the fiery evolutions of fate or suffered of an humbler, more easily gotten, commonly adapted belief, its godhead a trinity or as we please, and its doctrine but a faith or something less: why deny anything, anybody, or their pleasure?

Jokoin had fully demonstrated the larger possibilities of any ordinary sort of real susceptibility, Oyea had suggested the temple as a more fitting place, and a particular one as the most likely of transmission if not remission, and Hideyoshi really made no outward protest against its individual use or secular purposes: there must be some strange potency hidden underneath the force of prayer wafted within the portals of a place guarded so sacredly and approached in faith. The church too, then, either temple or edifice, held its secret, perchance worked an instrumentality, no doubt brought compensations that she, in her lone environment, had failed to realize: the world demanded of her that she leave no thing undone, make every effort to resolve its higher blessing, and through that and that alone she must and could attain her own true ideality.

Hideyoshi had, for all she knew or could surmise, done his part and faithfully.

“You have now my very soul, Yodogima, and are proffered as well its beggarly hull. All these trappings, with which I have fairly endowed you — a castle not made with common hands, the finest silks

evolved of Uena's grace, food that no god might disdain, and service from no lesser educator than time itself—are nothing as compared with the spirit I would invoke. Hear me, O Benten, O Yodogima, O Eternity; I must have life, shall survive the grave. Grant me this, mother of time, goddess on earth, and love to men; I can do no more; the blood of man is final; it is supreme, an only offering. Let me survive," begged Hideyoshi, utterly oblivious of anything and everything, except the one woman who stood over with anxious, motionless face.

"It shall be done," replied she, not any less driven or conscious of the broad seas of uncertainty raising and lowering their frail bark upon its never ceasing, always mysterious trend or disregarding travail.

CHAPTER XVII

LONG into the night Yodogima struggled hard with the problem which now crowded closer round, hemming her in and forcing her down till there seemed no other means of escape. Their own religion promised no relief short of the phenomenal, and her husband had made a last appeal: would again tear himself away, going this time into foreign lands, thus to retrieve his fallen prestige with further deadly conflict.

Something must be done; and that quickly, as circumstances indicated; the recently subdued daimyos, though loyal, were veterans, and out of employment, became unmanageable; using, no doubt, the matter of the taiko's failure of a natural son as an excuse themselves to break the peace. Korea, therefore, offered a likely outlet, and thither her husband should go, yet it must take many months to equip and move such an army as he had threatened upon so hazardous an undertaking. Yodogima reasoned that she still had time to save him and reestablish confidence at home.

"I shall in truth try the temple," concluded she, to herself, "as this meddlesome Oyea — I fear with more of knowledge than faith — has so earnestly and Christianly-like advised. Perhaps creed, after all, is verily some real man-made, opportunely-devised opening

unto the Way. I must, however, accept faith, as a guide, more upon the strength of Jokoin's fain attitude; she seems to have gotten for the trouble all she asked or could manage. This Christian device, though new and undemonstrable, if it does no more, may be the means of revealing to me a bit of the benefaction that some of our fathers profess these six hundred years or more to have found hidden behind the benignity of Buddha. Yes, I shall just this once, if not again, set aside staid reason to test dame truth, deny self at the bidding and for the love of others—the effect can be no more trying than the cause is just. My prayer must be answered.”

Thus convinced and resigned, sleep, peaceful and converting, brought in its round at waking a hope that held hitherto only in the making. Now she could look out upon the world with a freedom that brooked no questioning: the very clouds themselves seemed fraught with a charity that she had believed the part and the due of man alone. No longer need she concern herself about sin; the blood of a savior had atoned that: Buddha made it plain that knowledge is the way, and men, inspired no doubt, had builded a temple, sacredly ruled at the door.

She had, only, to proceed thither, and pray.

Yodogima really held fast at heart a true conversion; the same ideal shone as brightly as before; only the means had shifted; let them smite; she should turn the other cheek.

And they did strike. Long before Hideyoshi had

tried out or finished his advantage, Oyea clandestinely entered the temple and there counselled the keeper — she had known him for a long time, and designed better than he knew or Yodogima anticipated.

The morning wended brightly, and the confiding princess, departing tenderly the vain, mute welcomings of an ardently-inclined, hard-accepted husband, trod expectantly toward the selfsame edifice, devised and made in the name of One who consoles, be it man or his cold-striven image.

Two lions carved in stone stood sentinel at either side the entrance. These Yodogima contemplated in the light of a new understanding, born not of tradition, but of faith proclaimed and knowledge derived. She stood there in the footprints of an enforced progression, and must no longer question dogma, though God be greater. Then she turned toward the gate, frosted with antiquity and jealous of its passage — a receptacle midway standing glaringly reminded her of a duty that fortunately she had remembered: Yodogima, too, cast her bread upon the waters, and passed on, that others might feast as she did penance.

Intercepted now by grated screens, warning her that she must ask and it shall be given, Yodogima looked and there beheld an image, a true likeness of what she all her life had painted sublime. Neither male nor female, but of wood, carved in lines more symmetrical than reality had effected, lacquered of gold finer than the wants of ordinary man had ever acclaimed, these surrounded with safeguards seem-

ingly beyond human invasion, guarded on either side by emblems without either beginning or ending, all surmounted in a halo that two burning pots of incense ceaselessly wafted thither, this Yodogima, a penitent, believed with the spirit of one who would suffer no transgression to stay or hinder any fulfilment that her God might elect, and clapping her hands as inwardly decreed and outwardly expressed through time hoary invoked a passage no less distant or angelic than others perhaps as discerning or more plastic, of ages recurring and lands apart, had sought or denied in the lesser stranding of a course no more divinely conceived.

No further or greater low proving and encouraging of an inspiration born within, and the spit-ball propitiously thrown — not with vulgar meaning — the gates on either side the lofty emblem swung ajar — Yodogima had gained the promise of an inner sanctuary, where moods and morals are the more finely, if not subtly, wrought and there dwells no other god or goddess than communion withal.

Yodogima chose the right approach and her prognosticator the left. As an affinity draws, so it resolves only the transverse of an attending unity. The positive and the negative harmonize upon grounds no more irreducible, and that bonze followed his prey as the quadrant confronts a Cardan.

Lying there, at one side, behind closed doors, his own view unobstructed, this godly man, with the aid of Oyea, a Christian accomplice's assurances, had

penetrated deeper than the veil donned in faith gained and worn as a security provisioned, and discerning the motive augured a fulfilment that Yodogima alone had striven for in vain.

Once inside the four walls of this more than sacred, an over-beautiful, a divinely wrought, and suggestively potent place, our vainly beguiled and no less hard-pressed princess dropped hopelessly to her knees and gazing round saw no other thing than one bewilderingly done round and covering of modestly drawn yet bewitchingly significant prisms or reflections that led apparently to or from nowhere, yet emanating in or symbolizing afar the one ideal that had lured her thither.

“At last!” whispered she, as the sun above gathered and mellowed, merging and intertwining the fanciful and the real, till comprehension ceased and ideality carried her aloft the world she knew.

Only the soft matting underneath served her now prostrate form; the spirit ceased its aching quest: a reality bordering the extremes of ethereal generation possessed her. The great sun seemed marshaling its hosts. Glad bugles sounded. A myriad cupids, winged as doves and armed with bows and arrows, balanced and made ready for the flight. The great father of fathers reached into his mighty knapsack, and Yodogima breathed sparingly lest he withdraw empty the hand she longed to realize filled. The good benefactor smiled, and that she sorrow no more revealed to her the jewel — it was a son. And as the troopers charged

earthward, their purpose revealing itself in every fiber, the glad tidings of a fulfilment worthy and complete filling her to overflowing, Yodogima opened wide her eyes, and — Katsutoya stood over her.

Her dream, then, was in truth an unthinkable reality: faith, as designed, a pregnant hoax.

Words were worse than useless now, and the body as helpless; thus Yodogima only stared, the harder: with one furtive glance Katsutoya read her innermost thoughts, and flushing to the full bent his knee with partings still baser:

“Trust me, Yodogima: henceforth I am Harunaga.”

Yodogima did not attempt to answer her traducer, who departed as he had entered, professing the bestowal, only, of mercies latent underneath the sackcloth and of the beadroll. She lay submerged now; overweighted with a fantasy as far beneath the earth she abode as fancy had heretofore carried her above it. Darkness came on, tremors marked some hard internal disturbance, while yawning caverns fumed and spat fiery bursts and sulphurous clouds from the mountain away. The infernal possessed her. A huge dragon, half within, half without, at the summit, coiling and straightening, lifting and lowering, seeking and searching, here and there, all around, to the horizon, at last found her out, and mounting its slender neck, with no hold to retain her balance, the monster, rising with her, curved easily round and, retracing its slimy part, disappeared into the uttermost depths of hades itself.

And there Ono Harunaga sweat and forked at building the fires. Great heaps of humans replenished the fuel bins. These Yodogima scanned with eagerness: many faces seemed familiar, but always before she could come close enough to determine certainly who the victim was, Harunaga had snatched away and pitched him into the flames beyond her reach or discernment. Which eager haste seemed quite unreasonable to her, but upon questioning him he answered resolutely as of old:

“Have faith in — ”

Yodogima did not exactly catch the last word in his reply, but she could not believe it “Christ” or “Buddha” or “Confucius,” or any like name that she knew, because the furnace fender were himself a reverend man. No Shinto patron had been named; these were gods: the antithesis of Saviors, hence in fact and not on trust.

Once she thought she saw her father, but upon closer scrutiny discerned this victim's plight to be in consequence of the vain ambitions of three unfaithful daughters, hence knew that she must have mistaken him. This almost inexcusable blunder shocked her severely, and to avoid any further unpleasantness of that sort Yodogima determined, as she were there, to do as others did; disguise her own true self, and rely wholly upon deception to carry her forward thence in the quest of-all things hellish. Therefore she began ignoring the individual, and continued considering altogether the classes; and as there appeared to be

only one such there, she hit upon the plan of segregating Harunaga's vast unrealized mass of strident humans by considering more their color. And here, too, distinguishment proved difficult, though there appeared to be, distinctly, some awful difference in the flame if white fuel were added, or the reverse. The former flared more fiercely, burned the less willingly, and their screams —

Rising to her feet and looking round at the barren walls yet enclosing her, Yodogima realized for the first time that what we think we see is but the shadow of an energy stupidly awaiting over there the magic wand here to unfold.

Intelligence had wrought a true womanhood.

But invoke it, and the world itself were a fairyland — let gods be gods and the rest each his allotted part endure. She would live down the sin of beguiling, and bring to earth with ambition's might the heaven she had fancied above.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITH her eyes thus opened, Yodogima had resolved, perhaps too quickly, most likely altogether out of proportion to existing capacities, for Japan withal Hideyoshi's democratic tendencies had not then come to recognize woman as a factor in the determining of codes or the framing of morals. True, women had progressed, side by side with their gallants, down through all the chivalrous Ashikaga centuries, but only in a passive way. She yet carried the shackles inherited of Jingo's daring audacity, and none had risen to do more than suffer the penalties exacted of a confiding and repentant, if jealous, half in kind. Yodogima, though convinced of its susceptibility on the one hand and pother on the other, would not concede that sex were or could be made a lasting turnstile, through which to thresh or encourage humans.

"They have tricked and robbed, now coerce me," reasoned she, to herself, the while groping her way and pondering the consequences, upon that dark, quiet night, toward the home she had earlier left unstained and in faith. "Man, no less his better half, is a brute; born of lust and scarce started on the Way. His heart — ah! there lies the secret, herein uncoils a thread, and I'll begin it all over again by attempting to rewind the broken strands of my little life — in the

manner of their own eternally begotten process. Deception only may be sinful, while failure we know to be hailed not as a virtue. Success, oh, so divine! I think I know you now, whereas before I've only dreamed."

Upon reaching the castle, much excitement prevailed. Though the morning was yet early, troops were on the move, and where hitherto peace had held all at last seemed making ready for some big, uncertain undertaking. Kuroda had been relieved of duty there and sent to the front. All the faithful were withdrawn and Christians placed in stead to guard the gates in front: Kitagira left in charge, Hideyoshi had gone elsewhere, thus relieving Yodogima of the probability of any immediate contact.

Shut up alone at the castle, relieved of the embarrassment auguring in Kuroda's presence, or others of the old school, whom she could scarce resist, and surrounded with a guard more in keeping with her necessities, if not motive, Yodogima planned afresh, as hitherto she had only hoped.

In time, as well, her face brightened, for Jokoin had come to remain with her during Hideyoshi's absence, and sooner married to Kyogoku, of course, between the two of them there should be little doubt about rendering the taiko a son. Only time hung heavily upon her hands; no such preparations had been made within the memory of man as that waged against innocent Korea. Hideyoshi had demanded of them that they join him in no less an undertaking

than the conquest of mighty China, and refusing had thrown his forces against them; first to compel their aid, and secondly to open the doors to that larger ambition of his, looked upon by all alike as hardly more than mad.

A formidable army it was, too, that he had gotten together, in three divisions, dispatching one under the command each of Kato Kiyomasa and Konishi Yukinaga — with Ukita Hidaye in higher authority — holding the other in reserve at Nagoya, on the western coast of Kyushu; where Hideyoshi himself had established headquarters, the better to direct supreme control.

Thirst for gain, now, had won the support of every daimyo in the land; the loyal and the disgruntled alike; of which he had advised Yodogima, fully, at their last meeting — the possible consequence startling her into the making of any sacrifice to save him.

“My power over others has been gained by the sword,” argued he, “because of selecting well and bestowing better: to the victor belongs the spoils, and greed once the encouragement there is no end; I must seek further resources elsewhere than at home; this field is exhausted; the cry for an heir is but the prelude to gold — and why fret my life away mourning the failure of a son? China is worth while and Hideyoshi its greater.”

The fire flashed as of old in his eyes, but Yodogima knew better the heart — nor had Esyo misjudged the elder sister's influence or the position promising.

Hideyoshi had quelled the mob, but failed at organization: should any such vital realization be let to stand Yodogima in hand? Ought her sister, though older and "more handsome," be permitted to indulge undying fame, while she, if younger, yet "her superior," remain just an unthanked adviser to a daimyo like Iyeyasu? Not if she could prevent it.

"Accept of this invitation, from Hideyoshi, to join them, in the plundering of others — though you have no need or desire for booty," urged Esyo, advising Iyeyasu, her guardian. "It may be the means of proving what I have contended these many years, and Iyeyasu — greater than Hideyoshi — may yet see his way clear, or father somehow the conscience, to make Esyo — worthier than Yodogima — his wife."

Iyeyasu pondered, possibly frowned: still waited.

"Get as close as you can, to this monkey-faced tyrant," continued she, "and some unlooked-for riddance may discreetly arise. On the way, I shall, with your permission, pay Yodogima a visit: I think I can unearth the likelihood: her scheme we already know. You are rich and powerful now; Yedo has thrived beyond their knowledge, though Hideyoshi is said once upon a time to have seen without eyes. I tell you, the Tokugawa (Iyeyasu's family: its name) is a possibility. Trust me, Iyeyasu; will you not, just this once?"

Iyeyasu hesitated, yet waited. True he had risen to the topmost rank as a daimyo, outstripping any other in wealth and strength, but this he believed due

more to his own patient plodding and dogged persistence than to what with Esyo's brilliant scheming and multitudinous plans. Still he respected her; perhaps because Yodogima, however set aside, had constantly borne deeper into his affections; Saji proved a bore, from the start, as expected, and Esyo's mentality, always agreeable, failed of heart. A deeper interest gripped him, would not let go, but wait he must.

Those cold, hard-studied assurances, not flattery, of Esyo's, did not, however, displease Iyeyasu. Yet they failed to move him; and when he did, at last, start on that journey, which was forever to open his eyes to larger contemplation, it had been on other grounds; Iyeyasu feared Hideyoshi; he dared not disregard the command, and went as others did: to save their necks, and reap the beggarly bounty gratuitously suffered.

Once at Nagoya, however, Hideyoshi's temporary headquarters, Iyeyasu again rapidly rose in favor; he apparently had no axe of his own to grind, and the taiko believed him capable.

"I shall leave you in charge, at home, and myself cross the channel, into Korea," threatened Hideyoshi, upon receipt of bad news from the field; "this Hidaye is making a mess of it, and what is left of the advance shall have more need of my presence, before the river Ta-dong is crossed and Chinese soil has inspired them to renewed effort. Do you accept this responsibility of a free will?"

Possibly Hideyoshi had sooner surmised, hence inquired the truth, for Iyeyasu again hesitated; he had previously counselled with Oyea, and now possessed fresh intelligence at Esyo's hands.

"Let him go," proposed she; and, if he had gone, Yodogima's further troubles were saved — not, it is true, as Esyo planned.

Upon visiting Yodogima, as permitted, Esyo had found not only the one but the other of her sisters there — portending, to her way of thinking, somewhat, if not dreadfully, suspicious circumstances.

"How you look, Yodogima; and Jokoin, too. I am awfully surprised. Is it really true — and how? Oyea just said that Hideyoshi — and I promised not to tell. How stupid I am! Of course Jokoin might be expected — but Yodogima! How dare you trust yourself to the wiles of these Christians? Why, they are even, at the gate. I hope you have not the courage to permit their coming closer? And my gown; perhaps they have already soiled this very mat? I think I must be going — you have, I'm sure, observed the make and the fineness of it? Iyeyasu gave it to me, in anticipation of our marriage — and we had thought of inviting you, just to see our home, but — these Christians! I never could bear the thought — good-bye — I must be going — you have my best wishes — good-bye."

Yodogima and Jokoin only stared at each other; Esyo had come upon them with no more ceremony than at departing, and they were puzzled to know the

meaning of her unexpected visit: the younger of the two may have marvelled the audacity of her bearing; it is certain that the eldest had good reason to question the truthfulness of her statement, and did.

At Azuchi, Esyo had fared or demeaned herself differently. Both she and Iyeyasu had called there, by invitation — contemplated, no doubt, on both sides — and Oyea, alone and undisturbed, took great pains to advise the latter, to the former's entire satisfaction, of some things that were, if to be seen, only too patent; also, of many that were perhaps in truth the creatures of her imagination or purpose. She had said nothing of Yodogima's venturing to the temple, though she knew, to say the least, that she had been there — a circumstance, in itself, to be jealously guarded; particularly as indited of discretion or necessity, possibly both; Iyeyasu, at all events, would brook no tampering with the Buddha as adapted, for all his research, into the religions of the world, especially Confucianism, had only grounded him the firmer.

"It is this Christian influence that plays havoc at Ozaka," promised she, to Iyeyasu, who had risen to depart for the West. "They are in evidence, if not of authority — I won't accuse Yodogima; she is too discreet — at the castle, and as sure as I live they are in command at the front! I do believe Hideyoshi has fairly gone mad."

"Are you not a convert? I was informed that you were," ventured Iyeyasu.

"True, I was; therefore might be given credit for

knowing whereof I speak. And more, let Hideyoshi substitute my nephew, Kobayakawa Hideki, one of our kind, for that outcast convert, Hidaye, his Korean field marshal, and Iyeyasu shall not suffer, I promise you, therefor."

Going his way, without further parley or consultation about propriety, fully confirmed in and satisfied with his own views, concerning the priesthood, and Christianity in general, Iyeyasu cogitated alarm; the new religion's hold upon the government, slight as it was, as yet, or its influence over the taiko, if any — a thing he very much doubted — could be, easily enough, as he thought, stayed or disposed, but Yodogima! How, then, could he save her?

"But why bother about it? She is nothing to me, and, come to think, it might be best, as urged, to marry Esyo, and make an end of it. I'll test Hideyoshi, however, before committing myself," threatened he, hastening toward the end of his journey, there to spy rather than serve, while Esyo schemed, no more discreetly, at the capital.

As it turned out, there proved no need of his waiting, this time, as concerned, however, only the witnessing of results; the test had been, to his surprise, occasioned fairly beforehand: from an unexpected source, as well, hence doubly instructive. Jo-koin had before this, as might have been anticipated, connived the assistance of Yodogima in exacting from Hideyoshi permission for the return to Japan, and their settlement at Nagasaki, near Hideyoshi's present

headquarters, of the priests; who had been, sometime before, expelled for acts of intolerance and violence — such as the burning of temples and the killing of bonzes, and others whom they could not convert and dared molest — that had unquestionably settled for once and for all, in the mind of every loyal subject, the temper of these godly men and as well the drift of their converted allies.

This sudden turnover of Hideyoshi's startled Iyeyasu; he could not account for it, not knowing the source, and Yodogima held her counsel as well as Jokoin's. She had a part of her own to play now, and may have served some deeper purpose than a sister's sympathetic whim by temporizing for the moment with an ousted sect more at variance from her own views than any other hitherto attempted importation by upstart or trader. At all events they came, and their apparent entireness of reinvestiture at once paralyzed further conjecture.

"So this is the kind of keep the taiko would assign me?" queried Iyeyasu, of Asano Nagamasa, a friendly co-supporter. "Most likely, between two such fires, a Christian propaganda and an infidel ruler, Iyeyasu, his professed friend, might well be rid. I shall not remain: we must devise some means."

"Hideyoshi is mad," replied Nagamasa, in a high voice and nervous manner.

An attendant, within hearing, forthwith reported this last speech to his master, Hideyoshi: a hubbub ensued, and no further occasion became necessary to

warrant their remaining at home; Nagamasa was sent to his fief in disgrace, and Iyeyasu questioned.

"There is a lesson that we should heed in this accusation by Nagamasa; who loves you as he does his life; the barons have been, as you well know, subjected by force, and with the master gone out of the country they should be ill content to wear the yoke: Iyeyasu is not the man to do Hideyoshi's work," argued Iyeyasu, to Hideyoshi, discreetly: with a purpose and an estimation not wholly made known.

"What you say is true, but I shall go; I have better counsel," retorted Hideyoshi, not the least bit perturbed at heart or altered in purpose by his antagonist's insinuations.

"Yes; at Ozaka. As you have, also, the prospect of an heir," ventured Iyeyasu, conserving well an only opportunity.

"What?"

"It is as I say."

"Then you are a better man than I; I did not know as much."

"Thank you," replied Iyeyasu, not any the more disconcerted by the master's thrust.

Hideyoshi for once looked Iyeyasu squarely in the eyes.

"Well?" inquired the underling, boldly.

"If you have spoken truly — your fortune is made; if not — I shall send you to Korea," replied Hideyoshi, composedly.

"Then — I am a made man," retorted Iyeyasu, seemingly settled upon some sort of true conviction.

Interpreting Iyeyasu's last remark in the most favorable light, as always done, when possible, Hideyoshi's enthusiasm waxed significantly, if unexpectedly, afresh. At last Iyeyasu, by a ruse, had done something more than wait; the Chinese fantasy had been brought suddenly to a halt, and Japan saved probable humiliation, to say nothing of absolute defeat; Hidaye had already been all but crushed, and that, too, without getting beyond the confines of weak, unprepared, and unwarlike Korea. Had Hideyoshi himself left Japanese soil, with his contemplated reserve force, the trap laid by the wily Chin Ikei, China's over-matching envoy, might have defeated more potent, if less fantastic, ambitions even than Hideyoshi's.

None, but one, knew better than Iyeyasu the futility of the taiko's foreign project, nor was he any the less positive whom that might be, or of her desperate struggle against almost certain disaster: yet he believed Hideyoshi the father of her child, and bided thence patiently the further exactions of an inner conscience.

"She is both worthy and capable," reasoned he, to himself, contentedly, "and I shall henceforth follow in the wake of an ambition higher than mine, more tolerable than Hideyoshi's.

Maeda Toshiye left in charge, the taiko forthwith abandoned forever the camp at Nagoya, and hasten-

ing to Ozaka found Yodogima ill prepared to receive him. He had come unbidden, and demanding entrance to her boudoir, was denied: Hideyoshi fumed and stormed. Ishida, however, calmed him; he, too, had found it convenient or desirable to court favor and spy out an advantage there, and Kyogoku alone had been the means of his coming; Jokoin had also denied him, her husband, any sort of entrance — thus Ishida had been privileged happily to win as well as serve the good will also of Yodogima.

Seven days had elapsed, and in that time Ishida proved himself not only a master of ceremonies but a diplomat to be reckoned with thereafter; both Hideyoshi and Yodogima, presumably from different standpoints, recognized the service, and though absent, Iyeyasu no doubt had ample occasion to surmise the rapid rising of an influence hitherto not at all suspected.

The days, however, passed quietly, and presently the door to the taiko's chamber slid back gently and unobserved. Hideyoshi sat with his elbows resting upon his knees and his face buried in his hands; restraint had proven burdensome, though Ishida, his old body-servant's counsel had strangely come to wield over him an influence little short of Yodogima's itself. Between the two, Yodogima's wish and Ishida's advice, the taiko seemed at last utterly lost.

"You are kind, Hideyoshi, to respect my denial: pray do not think me inconsiderate; I have news for you; it is a son."

CHAPTER XIX

THE taiko bounded up. That voice had filled him as a chorus resounding tidings all but heard in vain. No footstep had broken his reverie; the sight of her seemed as impossible as the halo involving his desire; the air he breathed had lost its fragrance, the taste congealed, and the touch deadened, but another sense had called him to life; Yodogima confronted him.

There she stood, within reach, sublimer, if could be, than before. Words had vainly made her message better understood: not a moment would he lose, yet —

“Oh, God, who am I to stand here like dumb? How is it, these limbs fail me now, oh, so bitterly? What devil stands between us? Or, is it lack of devil, and Kami that denies? Answer me, you who can!”

Hideyoshi fell to the floor whence he had risen. The golden bowl was not broken, for the want of one. Charm had not entered, hence could not depart. No affinity proffered its good office. Love held forth elsewhere in the mighty circle, and these two searched their way under a solstice as blank as inevitable.

Yodogima, too, sank down, disappointed and fearful, upon the mat in front of her lawful lord. The child lay coddling in its lap, and her eyes beheld therein a joy that radiates only as ordained. The picture overcame him. He could not face the truth of her posi-

tion, and her eyes riveting upon the sacred book unfolding before them denied him the only lie that man ever made in virtuous part. All the laws of heaven or man, cause and effect, could stay the hand nor deaden the heart to that loftier reach, that unquenchable thirst, that touchless affinity, which made man what he is, as compared with the pitiful sight we sometimes see, only to wish it an unreality, that hairy monster, perched upon his hinder part, his arms drooping in front and his face a blank, that living, suggestive, appealing, undriveable thing we are always wont but mostly loath to call baboon.

“Oh!” cried he, inwardly, “am I so lost as to sit here as if mad? This woman is stronger than I, in the face of harsher trials. Be a man, Hideyoshi.”

Thence he arose, and approaching, vainly seated himself directly in front of Yodogima. The child cooed on, but two strong hearts waxed high over it, with larger interest and harder conflict, as lions trample their brood or the bird-kind but empty a nest in its defense.

“Pardon me, Yodogima,” begged he, cowering before her, his very soul the price, “it is so sudden — let me see your eyes, Yodogima — speak to me; I cannot bear longer the suspense.”

Yodogima considerately raised her eyes to his: they reflected back only the likeness of a man who had never yet failed to penetrate deeper, but now the heart seemed obscured by that self-same image.

“The child, Yodogima; let me look into its face.”

Yodogima tenderly, perhaps proudly, tendered the little babe, robed and attended as if want to invite really the gods to worship at nativity's shrine. It was a pretty boy, bearing traces in every feature of its chivalrous ancestry: Hideyoshi had been proud, would have prostituted every virtue that he possessed to proffer it the crown he had wrought, but —

"Iyeyasu!" conjured he, half in rage, half in fear.

Yodogima turned white, then livid; the child's doom induced the former, but duty quickly inspired thoughts restoring a healthier, heartier action of that one sense underlying the most vital of nature's primal instincts.

"Calm yourself, Yodogima; have no fear of man or devil; Hideyoshi would burn down there before the name or a hair of that child's mother should suffer the discredit of a moment's reflection. More I cannot say now: grant me time; it shall not be long; I would go no farther than Azuchi."

Bowing low, the taiko withdrew, and not stopping longer than to call the norimonos (chair men) hurried on, each stride burning deeper into his heart the dread that gripped him more harshly than any death.

"What is it that makes you reticent?" demanded he, of Oyea, who trembled at his presence. "I thought your discretion, if not his tongue, of better promise."

"Spare me, oh, spare me, honorable master; it is not I, but the temple that betrayed you."

"Ah — and he was there?"

"No."

"Then you have been —"

“No, no; yes, yes —”

“And know the truth, as I do now. Come, demean yourself; I must return; tongues are no doubt already wagging, whereas yours mutely convinces.”

The taiko returned thence faster than he had come. A cloud had risen from his mind; there in the presence of the one who had stood at his right through all those tempestuous years the truth had at last dawned: success attended insofar as others profited: thirst might be inherited, but genius transmitted — never.

On the way it became necessary to pass directly the new castle at Fushima, built for Hidetsugu, and occupied as well, for the present, by Iyeyasu as a guest while returning from Nagoya to Yedo. Hideyoshi, though anxious, could not resist the temptation to stop — assigning as an excuse some urgency that he and Iyeyasu visit the mikado, since the opportunity presented itself.

“But the child? its birth? why not proclaimed?” urged Iyeyasu, cautiously.

Hideyoshi attempted no immediate answer, but Harunaga did: pulling Iyeyasu by the sleeve and suggesting it a good time to make way with the taiko.

Now this perfectly feasible undertaking — Hideyoshi was utterly unprepared and without sufficient escort — somehow impressed itself directly upon him, though he had neither seen the act performed nor heard the words spoken by Harunaga; whom he had recognized, no sooner than seen, only a few moments

before, and upon inquiry found to be a transient guest of Iyeyasu's, traveling in train toward the castle Ozaka.

Our taiko marvelled eagerly the circumstance, and bided patiently some opportunity.

News of the birth had in fact reached the bonze — in readiness — at Hiyeisan even before Hideyoshi himself had been at all informed. Also the gossip attending the taiko's failure of recognition: stranger yet Oyea's enforced acknowledgment concerning the temple and Yodogima were known to Harunaga in time for him to discard his disguise as Katsutoya, a bonze, and calling to his aid some two hundred horsemen, held in hiding, make his way as far as Fushima before the taiko had arrived.

Iyeyasu hesitated; true he had not suspicioned Harunaga's motive, nor suspected his knowledge of or interest in Yodogima's affairs, not at all; but his interests dictated, as he believed and Hideyoshi surmised, an altogether less inhuman course.

"I am an old man," began Hideyoshi, addressing Iyeyasu, openly, and not without some pretty well remembered impressions vividly made by none other than Yodogima's long ago accurately aimed thrusts; "I find my sword heavy; please carry it for me."

Iyeyasu answered by saying:

"I had a dream, last night: I dreamt that Tengu, the hobgoblin, confronted me; and, of enormous proportions, resolved himself into the size of an ant sitting upon my arm: I swallowed him."

“Good,” replied Hideyoshi; “I see the point; I am rightly rebuked, for going about unattended.”

“Permit me to propose the good offices of Harunaga, as an escort thence to Ozaka: I need not vouch for him, a gentleman, and the taiko is —”

“A father,” interposed Hideyoshi, looking Harunaga squarely in the face.

The latter winced, but proffered his services, as urged and designed by Iyeyasu.

At Ozaka, notwithstanding Yodogima’s assurances, strange preparations were making for defence. No word had escaped her lips as to the taiko’s reception, or purpose in leaving, or intentions about returning. An ugly silence cast its spell over them, yet Hidetsugu, the kwambaku, made his jealousy against the newborn the more apparent by finally withdrawing to reside permanently at Fushima, and Ishida not at all thereby deceived, began forthwith the organizing of a new force no less to protect the taiko than to enforce the rights of Yodogima and her recently-born claimant to his lordship’s intended succession.

“Did you think me long gone, Yodogima?” inquired Hideyoshi, approaching her, at ease, and alone, in the great chamber, just off her own boudoir. “I was delayed no more against luck than strangely; Harunaga is here, now, in the castle: in fact, came with me.”

His words were wasted, for Yodogima at once arose to greet him, and never before did she seem quite as graceful; her hair, loose and massive, hung in wavelets far below her slender neck; the eyes fairly

burned as before, softened only with a compassion new and compelling; a complexion yet bearing the undercast of an ordeal intensifying the more its naturally olive-like hue, that long flowing gown of silken white which Hideyoshi had longed to see, and a voice modulated with the sweetness of motherhood—the taiko believed her in truth a goddess, thence prostrated himself at the purport of her answer:

“You alone are welcome, Hideyoshi.”

“But the child, Yodogima?”

“Shall I present it?”

“Yes; it is mine; I name him Hideyori; let lanterns be hung everywhere, proclaiming Hideyoshi’s successor; you are his rightful mother, and my sole support; believe me, Yodogima; I swear it.”

CHAPTER XX

WITH due promulgation, Hideyori's advent occasioned upon the surface great rejoicing everywhere throughout the land. Especially were the tidings well received at Ozaka and thereabout: still more earnestly by the older of Hideyoshi's immediate supporters — those captains who had fought side by side with him from obscurity to mastery; none among them had so forgotten his duty as to think of independent action or listen to a suggestion in contravention of the taiko; he had been their guidance, and upon his regeneration depended their welfare; the father at once became a god, and the son his natural prognosticator.

Quite different, however, with those forced or tolerated into submission. Iyeyasu had not tried out his capabilities, and Ishida served only for a purpose. Neither had sown that others might reap: each had awaited the harvest as best suited his particular need or environment; and now, at last, dissension foreboded their several necessities. Both, therefore, sought without delay to strengthen either one his own conjectured position, in view of the taiko's possible retirement.

"You have no need to make oath, Hideyoshi," promised Yodogima, in answer to his further protestations; "my interests and your purpose within themselves make us but one. Command me."

“Let some fitting entertainment be had; I have now an heir, peace is at home, and China, I am told, sends an envoy to crown me emperor; what greater joy could be?”

To this proposal Yodogima made no protest, in fact encouraged its doing, yet knew full well the purport and surmised an eagerness on the part of every dainyo — invited or not — to seize any opportunity to test underhandedly his influence or lay discreetly some self-bettered plan. The taiko had whipped them into subjection and she herself borne him a recognized successor, but would the nation accept an authority incapable of enforcing itself? Could individual powers be transmitted in the absence of personal prowess? In fact, were they a nation as yet? If not, then what, required?

These were some of the questions vitally confronting Yodogima at the very outset of her enlarged career, and she had answered each satisfactorily to herself: the husband's declining whimsicalities, presumably more tolerable than impressive to others — in view of their several intentions and universal unpreparedness — should be made to promote not only a devoted life's well earned vacation, but to attend as well the immediate requirements of those upon whose shoulders an unfinished work had certainly, if not rightfully, fallen. The taiko's frivolities, therefore, had been, likely, not only permitted but undertaken, and the completion of the Fushima castle was made the occasion: no captain would refuse, nor could any

daimyo have been kept away except by force; the first longed to do the master any honor, and the others to avail themselves of what they designed making an occasion for the feathering of their own nests, no matter when or where the chance. Yodogima had not been thought of, only as a mother, by any, excepting possibly two — one a daimyo, the other a bakufu — had not been contemplated as inevitably standing over like the sun emerging behind a receding storm.

“You must attend, as I direct,” urged Iyeyasu, to Esyo, who persisted in declining an invitation.

“I shall not,” replied she, deigning to proffer no excuse whatsoever.

“Well,” replied he, thoughtfully; “this is a dilemma; I cannot make you go consistently, but I shall resolve at least a plausible stay at home — you can have Hidetada, my son; perhaps a growing husband would suit you better than a declining suitor. Take him and welcome.”

“Oh, I am not so particular; an infant might perchance serve me as well as an older man served my sister. Then, on the other hand, there is nothing like agreeableness; Esyo is an obedient body, whatever else you or others may contemplate. Let’s have done with it.”

They were married — she and the infant Hidetada — and Esyo, in consequence, excused attendance upon the taiko’s grand cha-no-yu (tea-drinking party) — conserving probably Iyeyasu’s pleasure or safety no more than her own self-understood purpose.

Ishida, on the other hand, had brought all his persuasion to bear upon Oyea — the taiko had quite ignored or forgotten her, but Yodogima had not. Many of the older captains retained at heart a warm place for the elder wife, and truly sympathized with her for her many sacrifices and half-requited support. She had surrendered position and all that goes with it to marry Hideyoshi in his poverty-stricken beginning, and through all the trials and hardships of a relentless struggle had never once lost faith or asked a favor: Yodogima appreciated the influence her presence should have upon this the most vital occasion at which she had been privileged the prestige of hostess.

“I regret very much Oyea’s decision,” said Yodogima, to Ishida, shortly before the time set for the entertainment. “I wonder if some outside influence can deter her? I hardly think so, however; Oyea is above suspicion, and is the closest friend I have, aside my own good sisters. Please pay her my best compliments, and use your better judgment as to proper measures; I can easily enough overlook Eshyo’s idiosyncracies, but Oyea is a practical woman.”

“Your ladyship is quite right, and far-seeing if, perhaps, most charitable, though not altogether inattentive. There is an ulterior purpose, I will not say reason — there could be no justice in any sort of breach toward our good princess — believe me, your ladyship — Ishida cannot speak otherwise, and my long service as master of ceremonies to our most ex-

cellent taiko, his lordship — beginning, as your honorable ladyship well knows, these many years ago — as I say, such a round, so highly prized and as graciously bestowed, entitles one — I dare say, that your ladyship herself would extend to an humbler subject a consideration — arising only within the bosom of a traditional appreciation little in evidence these days, I tell you — emanating from a desire to do nothing contrary to the best ethics of the times — dominating the heart-interests especially of that one whom the master has permitted us each and all alike to serve and revere as jealously and considerately as the fleeting moments — ”

“Time is precious. Pardon me, Ishida?”

“Yes; as I was about to say; Esyo out of the way, Iyeyasu is fast becoming a favorite at Azuchi; and, though only a visitor at Fushima, may bode more than a kwambaku’s disseverance. These require drastic consideration.”

“Hush. You speak unbecomingly.”

“Excuse me. I have only your ladyship’s best interests at heart.”

“It were more like it, I trow, had you said ‘in mind,’ my good Ishida.”

“No less at my finger’s end, your ladyship.”

“Boaster — one might think you Sen-no-rikyu himself, to hear you talk.”

“Stranger mistakes have been made.”

“Not to-day, Ishida.”

“Yodogima — ”

“Stop! You forget yourself; the taiko still lives: it is he that we serve.”

The festal day coming on, and all in readiness, Sen-no-rikyu apparently took his place at the bowl. No man had greater fame than he. There had been brewers of a superior flavor, but none ever reached the excellence of Hideyoshi's day and favor, save Sen-no-rikyu, and he alone. Famed as no man had been at cha-no-yu, trusted as only a Hideyoshi knew how to trust, truant or designer, patronized by an age famed above all others in the wealth and luxury and refinement and indulgence of a nobility unsurpassed in the annals of time, this, the supposed Sen-no-rikyu, but in fact substitute tea-server, a scion of all that had gone before and a deceiver among adepts, may have rightly thought himself, too, a master, undiscovered and immune.

Had not these lords and ladies, serving and served, the kuge and the bakufu, come or remained there to partake of a hospitality made possible only by the perfection of an art, a craftood not comparable to the deftness of his hand, with the cunning of his brain, against the force of his will? What mattered if he traduced as others reviled?

“The hand that rules is not the one who feeds,” argued he, to himself, as the guests gathered in anticipation of all that Hideyoshi, the greatest of them, had thought to develop in life or fought to leave at death.

And they did patronize thus in gorgeous splendor. Silks soft to the touch and pleasing to behold covered

these people, whose bodies bore no taint of coarse, close-fitting and ill-shaped garments. The great chamber in which they lounged comfortably or demeaned themselves gracefully bespoke cycles of rigid aesthetics; the crude walls and hard-made floors, cumbersome furniture and meaningless ornaments of earlier days had long ago succumbed to oblivion's kindlier grace. The food they ate, and the tea they drank — only a god could brew and serve it as they wot.

Seated there as placed, no sense of man disturbed them — the animal had been subdued in times gone by — thought, too, lost all sway, and only the soul called down from ethereal realms a glory that made earth in truth a heaven.

A careful hand filled the fated cup. Nature-clad messengers bore it toward the taiko. The cha-no-yu had begun.

Two simply-robed humans, no different except in degree, sat at the head of this vast compulsorily punctilious assemblage — the one at the other's side. The messengers came on, and no sound issued or lip as much as moved. Hideyoshi raised his hand to take the coveted draught, but Yodogima, instead, seized the cup and, raising it to her lips, a mighty confusion broke forth, from Ishida to her husband, over that beaten and mystified audience — Sen-no-rikyu was nowhere there; Ishida sat in his place!

“What? Would you, even you, deny me first — Yodogima?” tremblingly asked the taiko.

"It is Hidetsugu's fault," shouted Ishida, undisguising in the confusion and rushing forward. He has poisoned the princess — please strike him and pardon her," continued he, snatching the cup away and dashing its contents upon the floor.

"No," replied Yodogima, composedly; "Ishida speaks falsely; it is mine to answer."

Outside the rattle and purpose of troops made itself quickly apparent, and Iyeyasu sprang up, commanding:

"My sword." Then, "Forward, guards!"

The taiko only railed the harder; he could not look or feel beyond the insult sustained; Yodogima had committed an act no penalty other than direst torture could atone.

"I have not seen Hidetsugu, know not his purpose, or any other man's, but I also have a duty to perform: if in that I have transgressed, then let me suffer therefor. What is one life as compared with so many?" continued Yodogima, without any intimation as to what she herself, Ishida, and the Sen-no-rikyu alone knew.

"Hideyoshi has been insulted and the guilty must suffer. How are the captains? Where Iyeyasu?" demanded the taiko, nervously.

"Time will tell," suggested Ishida. "In the meantime your humble servant would advise that Hideyori be taken in charge — I myself, with your lordship's permission, shall attend Yodogima."

"Let Oyea stand sponsor for Hideyori; Yodogima

has proven herself untrustworthy — do with her as you like; I shall have enough to attend Hidetsugu. Produce the child," commanded the taiko, believing himself abused beyond forgiveness.

Yodogima sank down bewildered. Jokoin had been an onlooker and believed her sister in the right, though she knew nothing and could not account for the circumstance.

"Never mind, sister; Jokoin shall console you," promised she, coming forward in a manner strictly her own, however menacingly it may have seemed.

"And you, Hideyoshi, are just as mean as you can be. Now, then," continued Jokoin, stamping her foot in the taiko's presence.

"Hei, yeo! Ishida, we shall have enough of it, before done; I know this little elf, of old," threatened Hideyoshi, vainly trying to hide a deeper, more laborious concern.

The world, however, seemed awlirl, and Yodogima had surrendered, but Harunaga watched his chance:

"Do not despair, Yodogima; the child shall not be torn from its mother," whispered he, and his words roused within her a new life.

Hidetsugu came in — he had flown at Ishida's accusation—in the charge of Iyeyasu, who had surrounded and taken him at his own quarters, while in the act of communicating with Mori, a friend to Ishida. It had been the kwambaku's guards marching, contrary to his orders or knowledge, but well within the plans and connivance of Ishida, that caused the disturbance,

prompting Iyeyasu to adopt extreme measures — cutting down and dispersing them without inquiry or cause.

Ishida laughed. He stood at Hideyoshi's right. Yodogima in the melee had disappeared, in company with Jokoin, as induced by Harunaga.

"I am guilty of no wrongdoing: God is my judge," protested Hidetsugu, confronting Hideyoshi.

"Why, then, have you sought to impose a new form of oath?" inquired the taiko, calling Mori to witness.

Hidetsugu stumbled — there were several Christians present and he himself had more than once favored the good father Grecchi, though none now offered him as much as a consolation.

Hideyoshi marvelled the circumstance.

It now came Iyeyasu's turn, and he answered by absenting himself; it occurring that there might be some further advantage gotten of China; Chin Ikei had not yet crowned Hideyoshi.

With reaching her own apartment, Yodogima's spirit rekindled; but —

"The child!" shrieked she, as it dawned that Hideyori was nowhere to be found.

The moments seemed ages now, and a thousand occasions suggested the most likely place to search — yet back of it all there stood the look of Ishida. He had proffered Hideyoshi the cup, condemned Hidetsugu, and baffled Iyeyasu: had he likewise the need of kidnapping her child? Were he in truth master of Hide-

yoshi? Could she not play him and Iyeyasu yet, one against the other, to some advantage?"

"Have faith, Yodogima; we still have Taketomo, my own dear little imp, and our intended ruse may yet avail — in the opposite direction. Would you believe it, Harunaga says Take looks enough like Hide to be his brother; and I'm sure you can have him, and welcome, for I should just love to find another like him."

Yodogima snatched the child up, and vowed that the rearing of children and the conserving of fortune were two occupations utterly incompatible and hopelessly attempted — Hideyoshi had, without further consultation or compunction, sent Hidetsugu, his three children, their mothers and some thirty other ladies of his court to the execution grounds at Kyoto.

"These are marvels, not virtues: therein lies my strength," surmised the expectant princess, long before "The Mound of Beasts" had echoed its final warning over against the headsmen's block in Sanjomachi.

CHAPTER XXI

A CONSUMMATION covertly auguring the final purpose of Ishida; who had so ingratiated himself into the grace of their master that an intrigue against him had been in fact resolved into a better consequence. With Hidetsugu out of the way, only Hideyori stood between him and final authority — so thought Ishida: another occasion might prove more certainly Hideyoshi's fate.

The doors at Fushima stood ajar, and Hideyoshi entered: there seemed no friend now other than Ishida; who, also, deemed it convenient or necessary to dwell elsewhere, mostly; and only sycophants and confusion surrounded the taiko.

"O Hideyoshi," pleaded he, self-conscious and overdone. "Has it come to this? Is there none left me?"

Only the cold dread of conjured ingratitude answered. Hell itself had been a relief in those drawn moments of flickering consciousness, and the taiko grappled the more uncertainly at every fleeting fancy that danced on in one endless concourse, faithless, hopeless, and uncharitable, then withering, again torturing, as if undecided or bent upon nothing more.

Ishida now held fast mostly at Ozaka: the child absorbed Yodogima's attention, and Iyeyasu found it no less agreeable to sojourn in the vicinity of Azuchi: here, too, the child engaged partly the elder wife, Oyea.

“Now mind you,” enjoined Ishida, upon Oyea, at a secret conference, outside the walls at Azuchi, atop the hill in Hiyeisan; “let there be no mishap; present the child only upon my signal; then Oyea shall be first in favor and Ishida her lifelong slave.”

“You can trust me, Ishida; do your part as well; the captains shall not ignore me, as Hideyoshi once did, though their recent conduct would incline one to the belief that they were capable of it.”

Jokoin had directly realized in Harunaga a gallant superber than warmth, even hers, could have desired: more fervid, perhaps, than Kyogoku, her husband, approved: not as discreet as some of Hideyoshi’s followers would have.

In consequence, Iyeyasu had found it possible to urge upon Yodogima measures that he little knew circumstances had made it possible for her to understand and seize upon — in their true light. She had promised, therefore — as Oyea had sooner agreed with Ishida — to be at hand and await, likewise, her would-be deceiver’s proposals.

The two, Iyeyasu and Ishida, the one planning and the other carrying out, had arranged with Chin Ikei the taiko’s coronation. The coveted crown should, with concluding pomp, be placed securely there. Hideyoshi was to be made, apparently, emperor of all the Orient. Iyeyasu schemed and Ishida advised: Hideyoshi succumbed, to their cajolery, an easy prey; he had subdued Japan, overrun Korea, and outwitted China, he thought; what were other men’s conten-

tions or reliances as compared with the feel and the fetch of glory?

"Let everybody witness Hideyoshi's just finale," commanded he; if not altogether impotently, then, perhaps, a bit sarcastically.

No man or woman, however, willingly missed the occasion; they crowded round from everywhere. Hideyoshi, arrayed in robes of purple, sat high upon pillows of curled feathers with hand-embroidered cases. His own three hundred serving maids lounged round the room or grouped in corners awaiting their master's every whim. On the outside bands of music horned or stringed notes soothing, but no longer stirring. Not a guard or soldier marred the serenity of Hideyoshi's belief, and only the covenant bearers disturbed the silence ensuing a taiko's exultation.

The crown rested, impatiently, upon its golden-lacquered tray in front.

An ambassador advanced.

"Our commission," declared he, bowing low.

"Read it," commanded Hideyoshi.

The interpreter complied:

"We do invest you King of Japan —"

"What? Crown me of less than I possess? No!" shouted he, snatching up the document, casting off that robe, and throwing down the crown.

The rage of Hideyoshi only increased with each attempted explanation; the real perpetrators stood mute in the background, the one bent upon Hideyori's destruction, the other confident of a mother's triumph.

The acknowledged son and, now, only possible successor destroyed, Ishida believed it easy to lay his hand securely upon the reins of government: trusting his judgment, the taiko could be wrought into no more favorable mood than the one at present so forcibly expressed. Iyeyasu, on the other hand, faltered; he adjudged Yodogima capable, but Hideyoshi fighting mad and in a corner had only too often proven it the death knell to any one, hated or loved, who had as yet invoked the temerity to confront him.

The plan in truth of his own making, and its working in perfect accord to this the culminating point, convinced him the more that someone had found him out and now fared ready to reap the reward of his iniquity.

Iyeyasu stood paralyzed — yet no one seemed to suffer a moment's loss or to heed at all any sort of plight in consequence of his failure. Iyeyasu, as if dumb, Ishida exulted the more: Oyea came forth as understood, and bowing down laid the child at Hideyoshi's feet — the taiko gasped; speech had failed.

Oyea, also, had insulted him; dared to flaunt in his face what he knew that she knew was not his: the taiko was angered.

Iyeyasu withdrew, as quietly as he had remained, and no one would have been the wiser had not Yodogima — hidden away so disguised that even he had failed her — observed his every movement: when he had gone, then Harunaga shadowed his further progress and —

Doffing the veil, Yodogima quickly, yet softly, and considerately, approached, unwrapping and laying before his highness another child, not unlike the first in face and form.

Hideyoshi looked up, a changed man; in a mother's presence there had dawned a new understanding.

Ishida rushed forward, and Oyea drew back: a common wrangle ensued, and no one appeared to know just what to say or think or do. Some contended that one or the other of the two children belonged to Oyea, for had she not brought it there, and proffered hers for recognition? But which one? Why her silence? Others claimed that only a mother could know her child; whereat the taiko frowned and Ishida smiled.

"Which one, Ishida; this is an important business, and there should be no mistake?"

Yodogima had claimed them both, now, in the absence of Oyea, who stood back, trembling and cogitating. No thought disturbed the mother, whose only care centered in the child; to deprive her of hers, she alone must make the selection: Hideyoshi had never knowingly committed an avoidable wrong.

Ishida blushed; the truth had at last dawned also upon him, and turning to Yodogima the closely cornered man mumbled:

"Which is he, Yodogima?"

"Let the guilty determine, as I have done," replied she, interested and secure.

“Both of them, your highness,” stammered Ishida, facing Hideyoshi.

“Then it was, as well, Ishida who poisoned, not Yodogima, but the intended cup? Away with you, and let one who has no need to choose pronounce judgment, for her son is my heir, and henceforth your kwambaku — I command it,” vowed Hideyoshi, with no other consolation or assurance than a mother’s kindly feeling, to foster and encourage the last act or wish of an utterly unrealized, if totally expended, higher ambition.

CHAPTER XXII

WITH the passing of Hideyoshi, Yodogima faced a maze possibly less promising than had the taiko lived longer — to suffer violence or subversion at the hands of those eager and prepared to take advantage of his decline. The captains, his real adherents, stood as it were, confused and unready; whereas had any one of the enemy's schemes to do the master false sooner proven successful there should no doubt have been in consequence a more pronounced or sudden welding and rousing of them to the cause he left. Yet, in the face of uncertainty, they gathered to a man in support of the infant kwambaku: also many of the larger daimyos proffered their friendship — if not to Hideyori, then to his mother — and Ozaka rang again resonant with the glamor of authority.

Oyea had been ignored, perhaps understood; Hideyoshi, at the last moment taking from her every vantage of authority — discerning Yodogima's true disposition — her own conduct in the presence of all and under stress of a last appeal alienated others upon whom she might have reasonably depended.

"I'll yet see her burned at the stake," muttered Oyea, departing unheeded and alone toward the beggarly inheritance left her — Azuchi, and that as

well with no other immediate chance or real adviser save Esyo, the wife of an infant, a son of Iyeyasu, Hidetada, verily Buddhist born.

A mixed situation, therefore, presented itself for her delectation. Yodogima had won favors on every hand, and there were no more Christians than Buddhists at Ozaka, with Shintoists a plenty and to spare over both. The government had been, as a last resort, intrusted to the care of five designated Regents during the minority of Hideyori: the taiko believed Yodogima competent to see that justice were done, and no one there assumed his responsibility more readily or inauspiciously than she.

“I’ll make my son ruler in fact, not alone suffer him to succeed in name: what greater end can a mother achieve than succor the laurels of a child she bears?” meditated she, as the luxuries — even shorn of the comforts — of a respected, though unloved, husband’s bounty showered down upon and around her.

Kuroda accepting command, not a captain among them — excepting Takiyama — wavered in his loyalty or bore the slightest mistrust. The chests were filled to bursting; no such bounty as that left in Ozaka had theretofore accumulated, and new recruits proffered enlistment from every source save one — Yedo apparently foresaw another need for its soldiery.

The regents had sworn to respect the will of their deceased taiko, who had enjoined them severally and collectively from engaging in political marriages of

whatsoever kind or character during the regency: as Iyeyasu and Ishida both stood highest in council, Yodogima very naturally had good occasion to rest easy thereabout on her own account, and certainly nowise other respecting Hideyori, her son and their kwambaku.

“There is nothing to this *San Filipe* affair; it was but the babbling of an underling, who, finding himself in a tight place, sought by braggadocio to escape further custody or avoid some fancied harm; please do not refer to it again,” begged Yodogima, of Ishida, who had called professedly to advise her of certain rumors, which she had sooner heard, emanating no one seemed to know just how or where, yet surmised high in authority.

“But Iyeyasu is bent upon expelling the Christians, and of course needs some excuse. No doubt your ladyship is right in her estimation, still there are other reasons why the good and faithful should listen to any proposal aiming at perhaps total extinction, and Iyeyasu is clever.”

“Are you not his equal? And, I am sure, there can be no good reason for drastic measures except it be political. Are a few priests, a dozen or so daimyos, and a handful of followers to be treated a menace? Nonsense! None knew better than Hideyoshi the province and probabilities of religion, and I mean to be as tolerant, if not so capable. Must you let every project that comes along, invented or otherwise, swerve you in your bounden duty? Christianity has

quite as much right or reason to thrive and comfirt whoso or whereat as any other religion: when creed has proven itself fruitless, it shall die of its own accord: as soon as inimical to further progress, then chop it down; man is neither rank nor incapable."

The sun shone hot out of a clear sky, and the shade fell invitingly from an aged wistaria that hung in profusion overhead. Threatening clouds gathered and banked huge and dark in the west, yet the voice of storm had not sounded there, in Ozaka, where they two sat, overlooking the glassy bay to the southward, nor had it quite closed with Amaterasu in her downward whirl toward the passing of day. They pondered, and a sail came into view far distant.

There appeared nothing as yet to distinguished it from one of their own, and the imagination played on. Who has not been stirred by the mysteries of an undiscernable ship at sea?

Once upon a time the good *San Filipe* had likewise stolen in upon them; a storm drove her against shoals; as was custom and law they seized her and confiscated the cargo; the pilot captured and questioned, confidently, but proudly, spread before them a chart showing the vast domain of Spain, his native country, and the ship's defender.

"How came your king by all these possessions?" Hideyoshi had asked him.

"Oh, that is simple enough," replied the unsophisticated sailor. "We first send out our religieus to convert the people, then seize upon their lands with an

army supported by the newly made Christians. It's easily done."

"What? My states filled with traitors, and the government about to devolve upon a child? Impossible!" cried the taiko, amid his adherents, and the echo had not died or ceased of its meaning.

This unguarded statement of the over-anxious, yet innocent Spaniard, of the merchant class — and not so particular about the fate of priests or religion — that, it were, had, more than anything else, among other things, convinced Iyeyasu of Hideyoshi's having acted very unwisely, through weakness or decline, with yielding to the importunities or blandishments of a woman, Yodogima or Jokoin, presumably the former, in permitting the priests to return to Nagasaki; that it now became him as a leader, first of all to remove them bag and baggage from the land. They had seized upon their reinstatement with an avidity that augured renewed activity and their operations seemed directed chiefly toward Ozaka, alternating between the highest and the lowest in or out of authority.

A prodigious evil this appeared to be — the gathering and fraternizing of the high and the lowly, the good and the ill, the interested and the disinterested, under the auspices of a single flag, unfurled and waved solely and authoritatively by none other than Ishida, whom he knew and could not misunderstand.

"You accuse Yodogima wrongly," said he, to Oyea, as they too sat upon a veranda, overlooking not the

sea, but that selfsame lake, Biwa, with its more subtle, if less inspiring outlook. "She is surrounded with evil influences, and must be relieved. Her motives are pure — over-intended — but the chicanery of Ishida is more than a woman should be left to cope."

"Then it is Yodogima that concerns our lord: the Christians are but an excuse?" queried Oyea, with suppressed emotion.

Iyeyasu answered discreetly with a question; still resist as best he could, the rising color in his face disclosed to Oyea unmistakably the one truth which had under-disturbed her every thought and action since the day she had consoled with Yodogima in the hope that Iyeyasu should not lose to Hideyoshi:

"Why do you ask, Oyea?"

"Is it not enough that I have insured you Hideki, my nephew's support, intrigued with Ishida to further your cause, surrendered favors, which I might have had, in the interests of one whom I —"

"Hold, Oyea. You have already gone too far. I am loved, and I love —"

"But Oyea is patient: I am not too old — will serve you — look, Iyeyasu; my face comely — form preserved —"

Iyeyasu turned away, toward the mountains: looked into space, limitless and conjectural. Words had been worse than a crime, then. Oyea read the answer, searched his innermost depths; she had failed the taiko; should Iyeyasu take her on trust? True her hair was streaked, but underneath that, down deep in her heart,

there held and beat a warmth as fervid, an ardor as prone, and the purpose as strong as of the days when Hideyoshi had abused a confidence no less compellingly bestowed.

Thunder rumblings in the distance, lightning flashes bolting the heavens, ominous clouds overcasting the earth — these drove home the dragon's fearful promise: Oyea only drew closer round her the simple kimono she so gratefully wore.

Arising, Ishida approached, and resprea^ding his rug sat nearer. Yodogima gazed the more intently at the tiny speck upon the angering waters in front.

"How like a human," mused she, as the struggling bark raised and lowered, bantered or plowed its way toward the beacon that fond anticipation shall never cease of hailing.

"It lacks originality," ventured he, in some vainly attempted response.

"As I do, you may think," retorted the princess, bowing with just a blush, which no man could resist.

"You grant me undeserved merit, your ladyship."

"Why not 'Yodogima', though not guilty of as much as a thought?"

"May I dare?"

"I should be mean to deny a worthy man," responded she, with a look more convincing than words could have been.

"I'll prove it, my lady. In the meantime — oh, Ishida; what an ass to bandy opportunity!" muttered he, bounding off, as convinced as pleased.

With a long drawn sigh, perhaps of satisfaction, Yodogima continued gazing into the distance. The approaching vessel had ceased to be a center of attraction, though still tossing and laboring with the elements. Subtler affairs now engrossed all the princess's attention, and clapping carelessly for a servant Junkei approached unreservedly:

"Call Maeda," commanded she, dreamily.

Junkei bowing low departed on the run; long service with Hideyoshi had wrought of him a veritable machine, self-wound, but motionless till sprung. Not far to go, Maeda soon appeared and the princess greeted him with reverence; for he it was who had accommodated her father with a horse and service on his last flight from the enemy. Yodogima loved the old veteran, who by dint of prudence and much quivering had preserved his life and retained a domain through all those troublesome years of Hideyoshi's enforced subduction.

None save Iyeyasu — of those near the capital, and only two others, widely separated, at the two extremes of the empire — could boast or master a larger income or force: not a daimyo of them all bore the respect generally that this giant of a bygone day enjoyed among them. Hence Hideyoshi, himself, before death, had singled him out as the best fitted or suited to exercise public guardianship over the infant Kwambaku, Hideyori, during his minority, a thankless undertaking at best, refused by Iyeyasu — perhaps at the request of Yodogima, for she trusted in

Maeda's honesty: believed herself competent and rightly entitled, if not best intended, to direct.

Maeda, therefore, was legal guardian, and no two held forth in stricter confidence than he and Yodogima.

"Sit down, Maeda," commanded she—he, too, bore toward her the respect due a superior.

"I beg to be at your service, my lady," responded he, seating himself near at hand.

"You are a friend to Iyeyasu, Maeda?"

"Yes, my lady," unconcernedly.

"You are a friend to Ishida?"

"Yes, my lady," with growing interest.

"Then I would warn you: beware of Ishida."

The old man trembled perceptibly; to question the integrity of a friend was more than he could do, and to listen to a proposal like that had fairly unnerved him—yet he knew this daughter of an older champion, had studied her every mood from childhood up: no uncertain thing could prompt her to make such a declaration.

"I thank you, Yodogima—pardon the allusion; I was thinking of your father," replied he, presently the moments passed.

"Thank you, my lord," responded she, no less spontaneously.

A greater respect could not have been paid him, or an honor more highly appreciated; the old diplomat thenceforth knew no higher duty, cherished not a thought other than to uphold the child whose mother

he believed divinely cast, no matter what his opinion or other men's contentions might be — about a father.

Maeda had pledged himself irredeemably, and Yodogima believed the fortress impregnable against the arms alike their cunning of any man or combination that might dare or choose to go against it. Night came on, and they parted; the ship she had fancied vanished, with the light that lowered real.

CHAPTER XXIII

ISHIDA and Masuda lingered longer than usual at the cups, on a dark night soon after, while their conversation, heated and close, kept rhythm to the customary "whack, whack," their metal pipes ringing and the hours lessening.

"Then it is true that Jokoin really bore a son, this Hachisuka, to whom Iyeyasu has just now married his granddaughter, Ogasa," queried Masuda. "I wonder how long it will be till he, himself, has taken Yodogima for wife? He seems to have ignored the taiko's enjoinder, altogether: perhaps he may have convenient some other granddaughter or such like for Hideyori: what chance shall there be for the rest of us then? I really believe he aims at succeeding Hideyoshi in authority."

Ishida-shifted uneasy.

"They say he was, once, in love with the princess."

"Love! He's too cold for that: I should sooner think him in quest of the treasure stored away there, at Ozaka, in Maeda's keep."

"Do you know," continued Ishida, without further reference to Yodogima, "that two of them, Iyeyasu and Maeda, united, are competent and capable of doing about as they like? They must be antagonized, and you and I shall do it; ally yourself with the former, and I will attend the latter."

“But Yodogima is friendly to both of them, in some measure.”

“So much the better, for Oyea is as hot against her, and if we fail at the one, why, then we have a surer remedy.”

Thus they separated, and Ishida calling at the castle convinced Maeda that it were high time for Iyeyasu to pay his respects to Hideyori, their rising superior. Maeda, the guardian, without any suspicion as to motive or consultation with Yodogima, issued the invitation, and Masuda as soon advised Iyeyasu that Maeda plotted to kill him.

“Maeda harm me? There must be some mistake,” replied Iyeyasu, a bit puzzled, but not the least shaken.

“There can be none, however, about this letter,” suggested Masuda, producing one, in the hand of its supposed writer. “Perhaps my lord is familiar with the handwriting. It was intercepted between Yodogima, the mother, and his grace, the good guardian — can your lordship unravel the meaning, to some better purpose?”

Iyeyasu turned pale. Though understanding well enough its purport, somehow the chirography did not exactly satisfy him, and wheeling round toward Esyo — who of late had made it her business to sojourn mostly between Fushima, Iyeyasu’s recently adopted domicile, and Azuchi, Oyea’s deserted or despised hearth — Iyeyasu — grandfather to Kita, Esyo’s first born, a daughter — significantly asked:

"Who wrote it, Esyo?"

Esyo stammered; for once she had been taken unawares:

"Perhaps Jokoin might know. Shall I call her; she is close by, engaged just now with Takiyama; you know he is quite friendly —"

"No; I would rather not put her to the test, as I did you, my daughter. But where is her husband, Kyogoku?"

"Oh, he's at Ozaka; preferred Kitagira and the shrine to his wife and a church; though Maeda, really, distrusts them both; poor, lonely soul; he's about the only Christian left there; a pleasing enough circumstance to Yodogima, I presume, now that she's a favorite among the captains and the bearer of a —"

"Cannot you control your tongue? Now Kita, your own daughter, shall marry Hideyori, as I command. Go hence."

"Where to, Azuchi?"

"If you like; I can do quite well without either of you."

"Perhaps."

Iyeyasu did not make the visit, however, and Yodogima, advised of the circumstance, consulted Hosokawa, Maeda's most ardent friend; whose wife, Grace of Tango, a staunch Christian, not only bore intimate terms with Jokoin, keeping strict account of her entangling alliances, but actively inspired some acquaintance with all things pertaining accidentally or discreetly to the new religion.

"Let Ishida separate Maeda and Iyeyasu, if he will, but see to it no harm is done either one; we cannot so much control men's acts as adapt ourselves inadvertently to results," urged Yodogima, no less concerned about Iyeyasu's than Ishida's motive.

"How do you know that it is Ishida, who seeks their disalliance?" queried Hosokawa, unadvised, yet suspicious.

"Intuitively, I presume," replied she, unconcernedly, but not without arousing deeper thought on his part.

"What would your ladyship have me do, then, if there is danger ahead for either or both of them; they must be gotten together in some way?" replied he, hopelessly at sea.

Yodogima shrugged her shoulders; a first glimpse at intrigue seemed ready to burst into fruitage more bitter than she could unmovedly contemplate.

"Whatever else you may advise, do not countenance, for a moment, Maeda's leaving the castle. Let Iyeyasu come here; it is proper that he should, and if he refuse, then beware: there are two reasons why Hideyori's guardian should not expose himself."

Hosokawa minded the advice, but Maeda did not; going directly to visit his friend Iyeyasu, who had sooner left Azuchi, to resume uninterruptedly his residence at Fushima.

Yodogima remained up all that night, devising how best to keep her skirts clear of an impending crisis. She had discovered Ishida, and penetrated Iyeyasu. True she had favored the Christians, but not

out of sympathy for them or their creed; she believed them no less abused than abusive, and among the flower of the nobility entitled to such protection and encouragement as her influence and position might render — the possibilities of their united support had not as yet dawned, neither the occasion; Iyeyasu alone had discerned and forestalled, planning the division of a house unto itself.

Through the marriage of his granddaughter to the son of Jokoin — innocent as she was — he had enlisted into his services the sympathy or support of the younger and most active in the new school; Takiyama, Gamo, and others of the hot bloods had followed in the trail of their bewitching Jokoin, while Kuroda, still piqued and guerilla-like, continued with the mending of his own fortunes far away at Kyushu.

Yet, in the face of these discouragements, Jokoin came in upon the deeper thinking Yodogima.

“Take my advice, sister,” said she, confidently, “and submit to Iyeyasu’s rule. He is able and willing and Hideyori is only a child, and don’t you whisper it, I believe he is madly in love with you still. Come, let’s have peace; and after all I don’t believe Ishida is a whit better Christian than Iyeyasu; there isn’t one of them, not a daimyo, converted or designing or otherwise, who would let go a single wife for the whole Christian paraphernalia — and I’m not so sure but they are right, after all. Let Hideyori acknowledge Iyeyasu — Oyea advises it, and as sure as fate she is wise.”

Without attempting any answer to her harangue, Yodogima bade the sister welcome, inquiring discreetly as to the good fortune and better intentions of Oyea.

“Oh, she is gaining somewhat in favor since Iyeyasu is known to have taken her up; but, I am afraid Esyo shall spoil it all; nobody likes her; and, do you know, she displayed the affrontery to drive her father-in-law, the great Iyeyasu, from Azuchi—I left her there, in the company of Ishida.”

Just then a servant came in, informing Yodogima that Maeda lay dying at his quarters, elsewhere within the castle enclosure.

CHAPTER XXIV

MOMENTARILY, at the mention of Iyeyasu's love, Yodogima brightened; something moved her to a kindlier remembrance of the man who had so often defeated his own intended purpose, seemingly with the sheerest kind of stupid neglect. That he had once loved her there could be no doubt, but the possibility of his having reëncouraged that love now grew the remoter, in her estimation, with éach attempted move on his part to set aside, as presumable, an established, developing progression.

A regime, however, that invited, till fixed and consolidated, every upstart in the empire to try for individual ascendancy—a privilege the taiko would not have denied any; he loved too well the pleasure of crushing them. Yodogima would have so marshaled her forces that none could disturb, but all might rise in one united, orderly and elastic trend toward a goal commonly beckoning back for the best that God had given man. She had tested this Iyeyasu from a standpoint none other had been privileged, had found out long ago Oyea's temper, if not her purpose, and could not now, in face of the circumstances, bring herself to believe that she, a mother; Hideyori, her kind; the nation, at large; or an ideal, that she had conceived, could endure the vagaries of

a man so attuned and advised as Iyeyasu had proven himself, whatever the sentiment.

"Ishida," she surmised, "will do only his part; every man is born unto some righteous purpose."

The messenger awaited her pleasure.

"Comfort Maeda with the intelligence that I shall come forthwith," replied the princess.

Ishida met her at the door:

"You are too late, Yodogima! Maeda is dead."

Iyeyasu stood by, and with Ishida's addressing the princess so familiarly a flush at first reddened his face, then a cold pallor revealed the blow finding lodgement in his heart.

Nor had Ishida's words roused in her lesser feelings; more certainly of contempt. She had, perhaps, at a fatal moment, unduly sacrificed her bearing toward him, but she had judged him not manly, yet wiser than to endanger himself by resolving a license granted, into an indiscretion, possibly fatal to both alike.

"You apparently take an undue advantage, Ishida; please explain yourself," commanded the princess.

Ishida only laughed, whereat Yodogima turned crimson.

"Perhaps deeds better than words might compose your ladyship. Suppose I name Harunaga; his guardianship, over this boy Hideyori, should prove to be no less willingly bestowed than agreeably acceptable. What say you, Iyeyasu; I understand that your word, whatever the opinion, is of great

weight, in some quarters, about matters domestic, if not marriages politic. Come, craven; out with it, before I shall have proven Harunaga innocent by chopping your head off."

"Cur," snapped Iyeyasu, whipping out his sword; "Kitagira shall be guardian of Hideyori; I name him."

"You are a coward, and an impossibility," shouted Ishida, drawing to fight.

Yodogima forcibly threw herself between them: why, she did not know; instinctively she believed Ishida, the civilian, no match for Iyeyasu, a veteran of many battles. Neither one of them would harm her, and their eyes gleamed the deadlier in consequence. Konishi alone separated them, though by so doing, he, too, gained an enmity that finally drove him irrevocably into the camp of Ishida.

The captains had seen Yodogima, the favorite of Hideyoshi and the mother of Hideyori, disgraced, and they as willingly held Ishida at fault; his apparently strange and rapid growth in favor, if not as suitor, at Ozaka had roused their jealousies; the mysterious death of Maeda, which none could attribute more to Ishida than to Iyeyasu, both alike detractors as well as usurpers, now, in consequence of Yodogima's apparent shielding—knowing, as they believed she must know, the one's utter inequality—suddenly attached itself to the former; Ishida had become intolerable, for withal Iyeyasu's faults, a samurai as against a civilian should be condoned unto treachery

—they swore, then, and there, to take the life of Ishida.

And Yodogima vowed, to herself, that they should not; she had a reason: Iyeyasu may or may not have had, for on the spur of the moment he considered it expedient or wise to hurry from the scene, hiding himself away in a yakata (small house) near the palace at Fushima.

There Ishida found him, as with hearing about the captains' determination to put an end to him, the lovesick valet of former years had thrown himself upon the mercies of none other than a master's widow.

"Accept me, Yodogima," begged he; "I am your true lover, and will die for you."

"You mean, 'but for me,'" suggested she, coldly. Now I do not wish you death, nor shall I marry you: I could not, as yet — I might say, for laughing; but, if you do as I direct, I will see you safely from here. Use this disguise, and reaching Fushima forthwith subject yourself to the good will of Iyeyasu; he may protect you, but if you cannot hold your tongue I should advise rather that you trust the captains; they are less apt to procrastinate."

Donning thus the guise of a bonze — he had, at all events, professed Christianity — Ishida made off toward Fushima fully determined to win the hand of Yodogima, if not by valor, then with catering, for withal his meanness he believed himself worth her while.

Meeting Iyeyasu at Bungo bashi (bridge), Ishida

kneeled and craved his pardon. Iyeyasu granted it; he had sooner heard from Yodogima, at the hand of a messenger, one of the captains, Honda Masanobu, advising him: upon recalling a previous conversation:

“I, too, have been considering whether it were best to let the captains make way with Ishida or to save him for further use.”

“Whose use,” inquired Masanobu; “your own, or —”

“As you think, friend Masanobu,” replied Iyeyasu, in the twinkling of an eye.

Thence Masanobu became a friend to Iyeyasu, and of the seven captains left by Hideyoshi, none was, however alienated, actively engaged directly with advancing the interests of Hideyori. Those who had sworn to take the life of Ishida now deemed it obligatory to cry umbrage at Iyeyasu’s saving him: between the two of them, Ishida and Iyeyasu, they all, but Kuroda (who continued to remain absent) alike stood ready and anxious to enter the ranks of the one or the other madly to avenge a threatening wrong, on either side attributable to a common cause, an assumably attempted infringement upon the rights and duties of the house Hideyoshi had builded.

Each of them, Ishida and Iyeyasu — the only ones whose ambitions seemingly conflicted with hers — had sunk himself so deeply into the mire that no rescue save a conflict could eradicate the danger of an after consequence, and Yodogima quietly seated herself, there, in Ozaka, apparently independent and

alone, upon a throne, perhaps builded by herself and unthought of by the taiko or those sworn to do him justice, ready to give and to take, frown or smile, as occasion required and fortune betokened: and she did as much, and more.

Iyeyasu, refusing to listen to the captains, forthwith sent Ishida to his keep at Sawayama. And that none might do him harm on the way, or learn too much about his liberties and movements after there, he afforded his own son, Hideyasu, and a goodly force, as well, for escort.

Thus licensed, Ishida lost no time in perfecting his plans — as anticipated by Iyeyasu, perchance encouraged by another still higher in authority. Hideyasu and his troops, at all events, had as expeditiously returned to Fushima, and no restraint of whatsoever kind hindered or enlightened the supposed past-master now snugly domiciled at Sawayama.

Konishi, and others, including a portion of the captains, stood behind Ishida; Takiyama, as many daimyos, and the remaining captains, supported Iyeyasu: thus Christianity had been split, and found itself uncharitably enrolled, each side preparing to battle ostensibly for the same cause, an avowed safeguarding of Hideyori's interests, but in reality the preservation of an established religion, Buddhist or Shintoist, whichever it were.

No one, however, so much as mentioned religion in connection with the impending crisis; none professed to seek political mastery; social conditions

were apparently satisfactory, but the war fever spread and the cry of everybody alike at once became, "Preserve the taiko's government."

"The princess verily laughed, and Iyeyasu, Buddhist incarnate, withdrew from the council and began concentrating his forces at Yedo. Ishida, professing Christianity, mobilized around Sawayama, and their respective forces stood nearly equal. Thence Yodogima, observant of every move, uninfluenced by their claims or their charges, gathering and neutralizing every malcontent, secure in her possessions and peaceably inclined, quietly looked on and the nation applauded.

"You are a dear, sweet child, Hideyori, and your mother just worships you, lives only for you and yours," whispered she, half to herself and half to the snuggling, confiding boy; who had grown, already, into a fine, dapper little chap, with the form and dash of a Taira.

The mother, like others, no doubt admired her son, but over and above this motherly instinct there developed and ripened a determination to live in him, to attain by and through him an ideality in keeping with his lineage and their progression. Through her he had inherited the manlier traits: sobriety and the colder forces of an harmonious fellowship should come of a careful tutoring, such as none else than Harunaga could give; he, installed, as personal instructor, immediately Yodogima had compromised upon Kitagira's appointment for guardian, would

attend the pleasure only of a mother rightly judged, measure truly a child's really inborn inheritance.

"How good it is to feel that one's energies are not directed aimlessly," cogitated she, drawing the child close in her arms. "I can now understand what it is to love intelligently. Yes, with precision. The primal instincts are only foundation stones upon which to rear a superstructure in keeping with our destiny. A mother's love shorn of the father's ambition resolves an anomaly. I must have verity."

"Will you be to him as a father should be to a child? Can you lay aside personality, submerge self for the larger good, and make of this Hideyori what birth and occasion demand?" inquired the princess, of Harunaga, who at her invitation sat there, sullenly contemplating a situation that only he and she could at all fathom in its deeper strata.

"Discipline has been my due, and confidence is your better prospect; if you believe me more than human, then, and then only, can you trust me to do what the world refuses; encourage others, at my own expense," replied he, his eyes softening, with a love broader than Ishida's, more comprehensive than Hideyoshi's ever had been.

The child gambolled upon the greensward. Embattlements here and there echoed the voice of security. All around were things made and transient, as at the inn where Hideyoshi had once shown himself to be a man. The significance of authority now forged and welded chords of deeper interest than the halo of

righteousness had deigned to conjure absolute, and Yodogima looked afar over all these things in the full consciousness of having found a man whom she could trust. And she did trust him.

This man, invited and encouraged, had refused absolutely to take advantage, and looking back over the past how could she class him no higher than human? Manhood were more; it savored of paradise, and Yodogima paused there, if but to refresh the soul and inspire its flight toward a higher fate.

"No, Harunaga," promised she, after a moment's reflection, "I do not trust anybody mortal, nor have I confidence in any thing unrealized; but I understand you; and in knowledge, primarily, there lies a salvation. Be sponsor, that my child is your concern."

Outside the ramparts, a savager duel engrossed the activities of principals, seconds, and spectators alike. The fife and drum fired men into heartier doings, but none measured so accurately as did Yodogima the final consequence: were she to fall short in her estimate?

These were momentous deeds, of far-reaching effect; all around them were civilizations and conditions bordering upon the speculative, but none stood seemingly as balanced as their own; China had ages ago waded through its materialism, and again lapped into spiritual inanimation; India had impoverished itself with elaborate dogmas; Judea had lost its nationality as a consequence of their religion; Greece and its philosophy had fallen before the onslaught

of a doctored creed; Rome had exhausted herself in spreading that faith; the barbarious hosts of the Northland, had, as yet, scarcely doffed the breach clot, and only Spain, of these embryo nations, with her cruelties, impossible barbarities, loomed large upon the Western horizon.

All these things threshed out, searched for and understood, before the days of Yodogima, she believed that even they in their advanced position might profit by maintaining some sort of intercourse with the outside world; in fact, could not close their doors to other men, however low in the scale of humanism, so long as the God ideal held fast in the human heart.

"You are a Buddhist, Harunaga?" inquired the princess, after a pause.

"Yes, your ladyship."

"And knowledge is the foundation of that belief?"

"Yes, most honorable princess."

"Then, why does Iyeyasu refuse enlightenment; Christianity, like all religions, is but a means to that end?"

"Because it is vicious, and the prince would be human," replied he, argumentatively.

Yodogima hesitated; she were treading upon sacred grounds to answer, and answer she would. The breath of a thousand, perhaps ten thousands, or more, years floated in from a realized haven to fan the flame of remembrance. This beauty land of theirs she knew, stretching far and away, to the very limits of an empire — carved and wrought of material per-

chance as crude and hopeful as any other now struggling as they once did — stimulated within her breast a desire to extend a helping hand: the cold dread of war, the cruel thirst for greed, the angry cry of, "On with the battle," behind it all, underlying the activities out of which their culture had grown, froze hard the blood in her veins.

Here were men blessed with plenty and endowed of godliness still striking at each other; more artistically, and effectively, but none the less cowardly for that.

"What mean these men by fighting so?" inquired she, searching deeper than Harunaga had divined.

"To enforce a will," replied he, without any hesitation.

"To vindicate the soul?"

"Yes."

"Then it is not cowardly to use force, or its concomitant?"

"No."

"I did no wrong, if that is true, in visiting the temple," mused she, unabatedly.

Harunaga flushed, then turned pale.

"Not at all, your ladyship," replied he, to her apparent satisfaction, though he knew very well that Christianity had been the means of taking her there.

"You are not pained, are you, Harunaga, at what I said?"

"How could I be, most honorable princess?"

“Then hereafter say, ‘Yodogima’; I love to hear the name.”

The personal note, whatever his predilection, touched Harunaga, as no other had; from the days of his childhood, in the service of Shibata, in far distant Kitanoshi, he had formed only the component part of a machine. The breath of life touched him, accordingly, as none other had done. Here lived a princess, possessing a mechanism most intricate, suffering the discipline of enforced conditions, with all the limitations, yet breathing the very spirit of humanitarianism. If such as she could find a place in her heart for the flame that enlivens, why not he grasp at a spark?

“I shall serve you, Yodogima, with all the vigor at my disposal,” promised he, ready at last to lay his fortune where she had denied and her father commanded.

“Then hark you, that none escape his mesh; these barons shall be taught what it is to respect a woman.”

And — at least two of them were apparently placing themselves in a position rapidly to learn something of the cost as well.

Mori, of Hiroshima; Shimadzu, of Satsuma; Ukida, of Bizen, and some thirty-five more of the eastern and central daimyos had already joined the Ishida contingent in the vicinity of Ozaka, observably, and a formidable host, larger than she or anybody else had anticipated, seemed gathering under the banner of the one man, whom Yodogima down deep in her

heart detested, the very aspirant who had proffered a deadly cup and coveted the hand of an intended victim's widow, the deceiver then standing outside the walls of her own castle crying, "Long live Hideyori," and, "Death to Iyeyasu."

Iyeyasu: the only man who had ever moved her! Others appealed to the sense, to pride, and to consideration, even love of a kind, yet, as events multiplied and the time grew shorter, a living realization momentarily overshadowed every expectation of hers; the godlight again shone brighter than ever.

Must she stop this cruelty? Yodogima asked and answered the question till burdened of its thought — she could have ended it all, at least temporarily, she believed — then gazed longingly at the child there in her presence.

"What would you do, Hideyori, if set upon by angry wolves?" asked she, of the child, playfully.

"Fight," responded he, with scarce another major word at his tongue's use.

"I guess it's the nature of the beast," mused she, pressing the boy closer up; "and till subdued there shall be need for gods as a God, so let them at it."

The chances for success, however, against such odds — growing rapidly with Ishida's popularity — seemed almost beyond the possibilities of one, though as capable as Iyeyasu, and — were he to win, Christianity must be doomed; she understood full well his proclivities and surmised their inevitable result. And Hideyori! Should Ishida win, then her own flesh and

blood must go the selfsame intended way that Hideyoshi had barely escaped. She must, then, choose between two evils: the present downfall of Christianity, on the one hand, or the destruction of an only living child, and that, too, a son, on the other. An ideal at stake, with her, who had chosen differently?

“You have my permission, Esyo, to visit this Hideki, now that Oyea, his aunt, is dead and buried. But, mind you, it is a privilege only, that your sister grants — perhaps for a better reason than the one you have in mind.”

Esyo sulked, but went nevertheless; her energies were bent not upon completing the subversion of Hideki from Ishida to Iyeyasu, as contemplated by Oyea, to the last, and now, perchance, thought of, favorably, by Yodogima, as an expedient, but toward a far more difficult and deeper reaching task: the substitution of her own husband, Hidetada, for Hideyasu, his elder brother, in favor with and as prospective successor to Iyeyasu, the father, whom she already believed in a fair way to win and hold complete mastership, socially and politically, yet, at heart, would not condescend to acknowledge a kindness at the hands of an elder, though most patient and forbearing, sister.

“Please do not trouble yourself; I am not so easily read as Jokoin, thank you; besides, it is unnecessary; I am quite capable, of doing as much, without any-

body's favor," snapped Esyo, hastily departing — none too soon, however, to escape a danger that she little contemplated, yet her sister had fully anticipated and well enough avoided.

CHAPTER XXV

THE horrors of war crowded in and around: also its exigencies. Self-preservation enforced some kind of participation: the same elemental voice bade her keep hands off. A fight to the death, perhaps the victor stamping his imprint indelibly and unalterably, awaited her: Yodogima sniffed the enamour of contest, of powers gained and a will unhampered, and the gods could not have swerved her in the test a Taira, of ages gone, had fought for the pleasure.

“I will rule, and men shall bow to a force subtler, fiercer, and mightier than any man has got,” shouted she, at her shadow, in the open, at Ozaka, and the echo, from the hills at Sawayama, as well of Yedo, burst back upon her their hitherto unchallenged answer.

“It is false,” cried she, this time, and the reply then pleased her; it sounded more like the voice of a man.

But she must not thus hurl defiance in his ears; had she not been taught for centuries that woman’s strength lay in meekness, arose from humbleness, grew with submission, abided the household, and sweltered with servility?

“Ha, ha — fie on them!” laughed she now, ashamed of her own foolish recollections, so feeble-minded and

asinine withal. "I'll invoke his tactis, but with a turn he little comprehends."

Both of these men, Ishida and Iyeyasu, must be got rid of. How to do it, were a problem. Ishida, it seemed imperative, should be attended first; his force had grown the stronger, and with Iyeyasu out of the way he himself would stand little in awe of her alone, concerned not at all, as he was, about scruples or the bushida. Still more, if needs use it Yodogima reckoned her hold upon the heart of Iyeyasu, whereas Ishida in authority had been a colder, altogether listless lover.

The clash of arms already sounded from distant Aidzu, where Uyesuga, Ishida's main ally, had purposely inaugurated a ruse to entice the enemy as far from the capital as possible. Iyeyasu fell into the trap; went there pell mell, deploying but a small contingent to guard the gates at Fushima: took with him those captains of the old guard who had fairly joined themselves to him, leaving their wives and families behind, outside the ramparts at Ozaka. Ishida struck first at Fushima: it fell, and the next move encompassed the capture and imprisonment of these same wives and families left at Ozaka, believing that their ransom would insure to him the disaffection and rejoinder of some of Iyeyasu's leading generals and supporters. Esyo, however, had gone; but Yodogima, for good reasons, best known to herself, remained as silent as the tomb of Hideyoshi had become.

Grace of Tango, the wife of Hosokawa, now one of

Iyeyasu's foremost leaders, served at once as a first and most likely victim. She, good Christian that she was, scorned the distinction, and extending her neck — as became a dutiful, loyal, loving wife — for the stroke of a servant (prearranged by the thoughtful husband, upon taking his leave), paid the penalty as became her station, regardless of feeling or profession. Made it possible for Ishida thus to blunder, and Yodogima to endear the whole Christian fraternity, of whatsoever camp or degree, by sympathizing with them in the loss of one so good and true at heart, if not of conviction. Nor did she stop at that alone, but secretly dispatching her own sister, Jokoin, the sooner to inform the hitherto somewhat wavering captains as she herself had better designed, incidently informing them that no further bloodshed should take place in the vicinity of Ozaka, upon the whole induced them, one and all alike, to swear fresher, if more susceptible, allegiance to Iyeyasu — for the sole purpose, if none other, of avenging the one death that had resulted so pathetically, yet none the less opportunely.

Two definite accomplishments Yodogima had wrought into the indiscretions of a foe — her seemingly most dangerous one, Ishida; she had weakened his position by uniting the men he had coveted the more certainly to Iyeyasu, and gained the everlasting good will of all the Christians whatever the colors they bore.

Ishida now concentrated upon Sekigahara, anticipating the hot-headed return of Iyeyasu and the sorely

tried captains now in his advance. Mori remained behind at Ozaka, ostensibly to watch the remainder of those wives and families, finally fenced in and abandoned to a gentler fate than at first contemplated. Neither would he withdraw from the castle, save as directed or encouraged by Yodogima; her company had become, strangely to him, no less delectable than the inkling of her plans (that she let slip, occasionally) seemed inviting, or threateningly wholesome. Hideki had followed, sulkily, to the contemplated battlefield, though his conduct at Fushima might have signified, to one more observant or less pressed than Ishida, that Esyo or someone as anxious had called, not without success, and gone her way, elsewhere to reap the advantage.

Hideki, nevertheless, was assigned to an important post on the right. Shimadzu half-heartedly manned the left, Mori's brother — knowingly, of course — maintained the advance (well off, at one side, however, and in such position easily to "slide" in any direction), while Konishi, master strategist and faithful adherent, bore the brunt, in the center, where Iyeyasu must fight to pass.

And they came on, the veteran Iyeyasu in the lead, a hundred thousand of them, with Hideyasu, his main reliance and intended successor, in the rear, commanding a reserve, something like half as strong.

But these failed to arrive, this flower in repose and the favorite of his father; Esyo had discreetly inveigled him into an encounter at one side, with

Sanada, the fiery youth whom she had unknowingly and as witlessly inveigled into the taking of sides against her own father-in-law.

The battle thus began and raged, at Sekigahara, without the aid or prospect of Hideyasu. Iyeyasu, angered at the failure of his trusted progeny, charged in person, took every risk of defeat, and Yodogima, threatened with the consequence, invoking a last resource, sent forthwith for Mori, saying:

"Advise your brother to hasten here; I can better serve him with Iyeyasu than with Ishida."

No further encouragement need she use, for these were not fighting men; Hideyoshi had previously taught them the greater potency of diplomacy. But Hideki!

"Jokoin?" commanded Yodogima.

"I am here, sister."

"Can you reach Iyeyasu?"

"Certainly," replied she, as confident as in the days of Kamakiyama.

"Then tell Iyeyasu to fire upon Hideki. He will inquire the reason, but you are to reply that Yodogima commands it."

Jokoin did as bid, and Iyeyasu pondered why; Esyo had advised him of a different understanding, but somehow he could not resist the lure of Yodogima. Time were precious, just now, too much so to waste it parleying with self, so the order was given: Hideki, stunned and driven, rallied his men and wheeling

joined his would-be confederate, Iyeyasu, and the battle was won.

None but Yodogima knew how it had been done or the disaffection brought about, but there was one who down in his heart bled at the failure of a son and would hearken only the savior of Sekigahara. Ishida routed and butchered, Iyeyasu turned as hastily toward Ozaka.

CHAPTER XXVI

MARCHING down the valley, set with peaceful homes, disturbed only by the retreating fragments of a broken and routed army, twice the size of his but then endangered advance, Iyeyasu marvelled the unstability, the pliability, the simplicity, and withal the potency of man.

The mountains around sat upon their base, unmovable, except at the cost of total annihilation; vegetation retained its vitality, till stricken from the root giving sustenance; wild beasts at bay, fought unto death. But man, he above all others, turned his heels at the commonest occasion, more than any other creature here on earth stupidly hearkened the devil, willingly disobeyed the divinest of injunctions, "know thyself." It resolved that the more his liberty were granted the less intelligence he retained; and yet a new civilization had come to their door, knocking, and carrying with it seeds of discontent, quarrelling over methods of government, as unsettled about the origin of man as uncertain of God's (Kami's) prevision.

"Away with such nonsense," threatened he, travelling along, fully resolved. "These hills and valleys have held to the truer doctrine since Izanagi and Izanami (the god and the goddess principles positive and negative), meeting upon the floating bridge of

heaven, did as God (Kami) willed, placing man upon this earth to do and survive His edict and that only. Speculate as you will, man bears no ultimate relation to the things placed here for his use and sustenance. He is descended from above: let the jungle answer to his call; intelligence looks heavenward: the throne unmistakably echoes the voice of God."

And in that revelation, as before, perfumed with the creeping, sheltering azaelia, Iyeyasu discerned the hand of Yodogima. He would now hasten to her and claim what then he had the courage to refuse. God had preserved her for him and him for her. The failure of Hideyasu, his own son, had come as a fitting rebuke to the devil lurking underneath: his soul at last seemed purified; the fragrance, the divinity of love now found within a befitting response; the mind cleared in its vision, strengthened of a will untarnished, the soul cried out, livid and alluring—God had willed him great, and in that love, which had not once failed him, the godhead unfolded atop that it is not a province or pleasure to doubt and question.

Christianity had set up faith as gospel, which had fallen at the first stand; courage faced it, divided them, and crushed theirs: his edict alone should suffice to banish as much forever from the land: what more the breath of a goddess; one fraught with the inspiration of victory; a living example of the divinity of man; the very incarnation of purity; her transcendent ideal worthy of his most uncompromising sanctity—Iyeyasu, penitent, in the face of all that

had gone before, regardless of doubting men's opinions or the carping tongues of unfitted women, still believed Yodogima inviolate: held her incapable of word or deed suggestive though befitting.

"My foot is upon the dragon's neck: appear, goddess divine; it is I who speaks!" commanded he, halting at the mountain's crest, overlooking the spreading valley, where reposed the harbinger of his fancied haven.

The hero of Sekigahara had dreamed before, husbanded a love absorbing virtues as intense, but never had reality seemed as close as now. Fired at the thought of mastery, he would drink deeper than ideality had bidden, quaff at last the golden elixir of a realized fount, bring down to earth heaven's supremest joy and trend thence the glad onrush with the prize of living securely resting willingly and unbidden in his arms.

The heavens over him rent in twain, and out of the once unfathomed gap there streamed the warmth and radiance of Amaterasu, grand, inspiring, and withal so promising. The light of love cast its halo over the peaceful, towering walls of Ozaka: the face of Yodogima stood out smilingly against a background of blue there reflected, overset the dark, unvisaged canopy of time sweltering and seething underneath.

"She is mine — God, she is mine!" swore he, stamping down the hill-slope, his veins dilated, and expression overjoyed.

There, in the sunlight, high over the emblazoned

embattlements, with the gates closed, an army of faithful defenders, at either side, overhead, and at every turret stationed, the hills and valley responding to the glad visitation of now rapidly receding, romping rain clouds, Yodogima pleasingly returned that message which holds dearer than life the truth of existence.

"It is he!" cried she, "God knows that I love him — see! He has made the very elements oblivious to any denial. Oh, Iyeyasu; fail me not. What are these dead and living things, but for you? Hasten, oh hasten; dread moments fly; he comes; bravo!"

Hurrying maids, and mirrors, and treasures dear, told the welcome that then awaited his coming. Cranes white as snow stalked lazily in the reed marshes, and flowers precious perfumed the gardens in readiness. Spotless floors and walls of golden lacquer again hushed with expectancy. There were cuckoos now of rarest note, and banks and borders of geishas to enliven every step, and charm — the soul poured out its abundance, the heart trembled at only thought, the mind waxed eager and resplendant, and the tongue failed her:

"Come, oh come — my lover, come!"

Down at the gates, across the moats, underneath the outer walls, of those triple terraced embankments, from the housed-over plain at the bottom, to the terrated enclosures above, an ardent, anxious, confident man rapped impatiently, hotly, daringly for admission.

"Who comes there?" rang out huskily, at the tunnelled-out entrance.

Iyeyasu paused; the defiance seemed as if from below. No such sound had disturbed his fancied right since the days when a worthier blade dared invoke the blessings of denial, and the dull grindings of an indiscernable machine, the tireless demands of an unfaltering conventionality, startled him into questioning verily the survival of anything.

"There must be some mistake," ventured he, coldly pondering the consequence of his arrest.

"No; there is none," answered the keeper, in order; "travellers should make sure that they are prepared, before seeking entrance to a strange place; the princess, Yodogima, resides within, and as observed you have come a long way, with a large retinue, and must be desirous of some rest and recreation. Pray you, keep without, till quite ready; the princess just now implores: I command it."

"But I am not a stranger here: the princess wills me enter."

"Just so. Therefore look you well that deed and will carry corresponding virtues, before the one lower in consequence invokes another higher in authority. Come, prepare yourself; it has been done, before."

"Iyeyasu waits on none; I have the means at hand to enforce my way."

"So you have, but consider first the defence; no man passes here except at his peril."

Iyeyasu withdrew, and Kyogoku reported the cir-

cumstance to his superior, Kitagira; who had dispatched him for his audacity had not Jokoin appeared to prevent it; Iyeyasu had sent her in to inquire the reason of his refusal; she, counselling Yodogima, sought to fasten the blame upon Kitagira; thus saving her own husband, for purposes of her own, at the expense of Kitagira, an innocent man; whom Iyeyasu forthwith insisted should be dismissed and banished, before himself consenting to an audience with Yodogima; having sooner effected his own entrance past Kyogoku in the disguise of a woman's palanquin.

"Iyeyasu refuses to see me, except the child's guardian be dismissed?" repeated Yodogima, thoughtfully.

"That is the advice," replied Harunaga, who had interceded to save Kitagira.

"Then let Kitagira produce Iyeyasu; here, in audience; he has the force with which to do it: if he have not the courage, why, then, Iyeyasu may dismiss him; I have, as it is, really no occasion for doing so — but, I want to see Iyeyasu."

Kitagira vacillated; he believed Harunaga's growing influence over Hideyori and estimate by the mother unwarranted, and would have married Yodogima to Iyeyasu at once had he not discerned in that the ultimate defeat of Hideyoshi, the deceased taiko's succession. Said he, to Hayami Morihisa, a captain of the Ozaka guard:

"Iyeyasu plans to wed Yodogima and substitute himself in authority over Hideyori: what we must do is to gain time. Let him take her as hostage, if he

choose, but see to it that no marriage take place while the son is yet under age. Hideyori is an intelligent lad, and capable of crushing Hidetada or any other of Iyeyasu's descendants, but in the meantime, we should let Iyeyasu die; to go against him now, with the crushed and defeated Christians acknowledging Ozaka's protection, would be but to invite defeat; the daimyos and captains of established faith would, to a man, rally to the cause of Iyeyasu."

You reason well, Kitagira," replied Hayami, thereat approved in what he said by the remainder of the seven captains, "but Harunaga, as a man, could not recommend it, and his advice is paramount at court. Nor would, nor should the daimyos submit to Yodogima's virtual imprisonment; the taiko never contemplated any such irreverence, and I am sure that she, herself, to-day, with a voice unequalled by any other, among all classes, throughout the land, once able to resist Hideyoshi, himself, as she was, would hardly consent to a degradation of the sort you suggest, or so belittle herself and those dependent upon her as to fawn favors for or of anybody. I shall advise Harunaga of your plans and let him decide; he stands best in favor with Yodogima."

And he did so, forthwith.

"It is a make-believe," replied she, to Harunaga, who had related the proposal, truthfully and unreservedly; "Iyeyasu is not so much to fear — yet I shall not dismiss Kitagira; he is a creature of Iyeyasu's,

and my best and only pawn. Does Iyeyasu still refuse me a visit?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Please do not call me 'dear'; it is enough to retain one's confidence in men, without their overstepping bounds granted. But this Iyeyasu: where is he now, that he can refuse?"

"Inside the castle grounds, and not so very far distant, either, your ladyship."

"Not 'your ladyship', Harunaga; I said it should be 'Yodogima'—I do believe the world itself shall sooner or later grow into a veritable machine."

"Yodogima!"

"That is more to my liking. Why everybody or anybody so impersonal? But Iyeyasu: I shall go to him, he refusing to come to me: perhaps Kitagira may thus retain his head, and I my lover. What think you, Harunaga?"

"I am at your service."

"And I can trust you; results are the best sort of proof."

The fires had by this time considerably abated, and out of the glowing embers there burned a warmth as steady and as sure as the reactional beating back upon a passionate ordainedly evolves within life's exultant strand. Iyeyasu sulked, and Yodogima took heart; his brow darkened, and her intention waxed the brighter; had his will been permitted, her lot need not have been resolved, for he would have her shorn of every influence but his; he believed her pure,

and out of his blamelessness and its correlative demands had come reflection: making it possible for Yodogima to decide upon revealing the exact light in which she responded—the only meed of a living affinity.

“I hope I find you comfortable, and —”

“In a good humor,” responded he, to her half spoken address; barely turning to recognize her, as she approached, considerately; bowing as became her and the niceties of the situation prompted.

“Yes,” replied she, unabashed; “I am, and why should Iyeyasu not be in as fair mood?”

“Perhaps I ought to be, but I cannot quite bring myself to believe that I am as deserving. You make sport with me, I do so myself, and the world is no different than we.”

“It is more alluring, however, I take it, in the case of some than of others. Look underneath the smiles, Iyeyasu; it is not all gold that glitters; perchance my heart may have bled, is bleeding this very minute; do not consider me happy, till —”

“I am out of the way,” interceded he, not one whit thawed or observant.

“Look at me,” commanded she, her very frame racking with a passion that he, in his coldness, had not the power to comprehend.

“You do love me, then,” stammered Iyeyasu, ravenously reading the words so lengthily written for his dull eyes to feast faun-like upon.

“Love you? I presume you know what it is to love? I do.”

“Yodogima! Forgive me,” plead he, the clouds vanishing as they had gathered: uncontrolled and misapprehended.

“Yes; but not with the assurance you possess,” replied Yodogima, more anxious to divulge than he were ready to exact, now, any secret incapable of ingaining or outliving a nature as commonplace as his.

The princess had seated herself, at leisure, a little in front of the rapidly recovering lover, whose ardor would again have bordered the extreme had not her last admonition once more set him thinking. But Iyeyasu's mind moved like a tortoise, and Yodogima flushed a little, no doubt at the prospect of having to reach a bit deeper into that unthinkable comprehension of his — with which she had wrestled mostly since their meeting underneath the really suggestive azaelia.

Iyeyasu observed, however, the one indiscretion, and would have bowed to the mat, at her feet — no closer contact being permitted, either in heart or at will, by the bushido and of choice — but for Yodogima's further cautioning:

“Pray do not prostrate yourself; the victor may not prove to have been worthy.”

Iyeyasu held himself, sat there in bended fashion, considering half-doubtfully, half-consciously the warning. A thousand possibilities leaped to the fore, suddenly and provokingly. Had he been wrong, and

her detractors truthful; were she clever, and he over-trustful; did some terrible revelation parch those lips he had sworn divine; or was it the idle mockings of his own brutal response that troubled her and mystified him?

"Tell me, Yodogima — no, no; you must not; it would kill me; it is not true; they speak falsely — shall this weapon vindicate me, or you, Yodogima; you have but to nod the head, and spare your lips!"

"Ha, ha, ha — Iyeyasu! Put away that knife and invoke a wit. I should never have guessed you half so sentimental. Why, I do believe you would make a martyr of yourself, or me — who wouldn't be at all worth the trouble. Come; sit down again; let us reason it out; one drop of blood is, after all, worth a lot of nobleness — as codes are written in these times."

"I'll never sit down, till you declare them false — that you are determined to talk, as all women are. Nor have I anything to gain, at my age, by reasoning; acting is all important, whatever the point, now that the end crowds fast upon me. Shout it if you like, but consider well the effect."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Take care of your own shattered prospects; I have all I can do to bear with you, let alone conserve your ease. You deny me the privilege of explaining, hence defeat me of a duty I had intended performing."

"Oh, well; I can presume as much."

"If you like, pray do."

"I shall."

"Then what?"

"Go."

"And why?"

"Because you are lost."

"Then I but knock in vain!"

"Christianity is responsible for it, not I — understanding had saved the need of forgiveness."

"Perhaps; but I should advise you, if advice be meet, to listen; there may not be, after all, so much to choose, between knowledge and faith. Have you no other estimate?"

"No; nor do I want one; I am satisfied."

"And I am pained; yet I have faith: were 'knowing' my only asset, I should shut you in, here, till good and done with you; I, too, might make some sordid use of a plaything, but there are larger compensations in store for those who look more charitably upon their brothers: therefore I dismiss you, with a suitable escort hence."

Iyeyasu went as permitted and directed.

Had she driven her lover from her? Should she have accepted him on faith, granted his unchallenged desire, and ignored truth? Might either passive, or, if needs be, active lying have resolved better their happiness? Could heaven be attained without knowledge? Buddhism said no; Christianity claimed yes, but deeper than these, broader than either, more compelling than any other, Yodogima's religion searched, expanded, and enforced truth's unclaimed adherence.

And yet, how attain it? In denying him, she had falsified: in accepting she had done more: how reduce the blessings of God — infinite, all-compulsory?

The very thought of her great sin overbore Yodogima with a determination to survive any test. The walls around her resounded with a growth and a strength fairly laughing to scorn the very desirability of absolution — Iyeyasu had done right, and yet erred; Christ filled a void, at least, and for that should not be cast upon.

“I’ll live down the wrong I’ve done,” mused she, “and when it’s absolved with the blood shed of my own veins, there’ll be no need of condonations, and faith, hope, and charity, knowledge, uprightness or consideration, the state, the church, and the castes, shall have vanished in the stead of one united and indivisible brotherhood, where sin and sorrow, the virtues and the joys are no longer remembered of man.

The countenance of her fathers looked down from an old kakemono (picture) hanging from the wall, behind the shrine, above the potted pine, with kindly expression.

The princess gazed long and earnestly thereat, then said to herself:

“You, too, shall vanish, and all that we prize or hate of this earth shall have sometime proven itself of no more final consequence than the slenderest reed that grows and withers with the rising and the setting of the sun. My little sins and virtues, his, and theirs,

will then resolve and not abide the existence of a soul. - God himself shall stand revealed, and the world attain its destined end — a heaven here where men are doomed, and none denied, of treasures yet undreamed.”

Sitting within the confines of her own allotted environment, far removed from the turmoils of rendering, shorn of creation's compensatory appeal, but clothed with the choicer products of highest endeavor, Yodogima, too, pondered the complexity of human nature, and its languor or celerity in rendering the tidy milestones so highly prized or bitterly condemned as we go. Yet, unlike Iyeyasu, she had partaken thereof a self-suffered resignation. What the consequence?

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR the other, there seemed but a single course. He had exhausted, as it would appear, all the avenues open to him but one. No such thing as being born again had entered into Iyeyasu's curriculum, and the very tenets of his religion scorned the lesser beattitudes of a troubled soul. Stoicism had survived mercy, and his goddess profaned the world must answer.

"Concentrate at Fushima," commanded he, of Hidetada, now his favorite, and most trusted commander.

"But Hideyasu is intractable: refuses to obey Hidetada, his younger," replied Esyo, before Hidetada, her husband, could make any answer.

"Then let him be humbled; I declare Hidetada my successor, and do invest him with supreme authority under me," declared Iyeyasu; Esyo withdrawing to convey the intelligence, to her displaced brother-in-law, with all the force and color at her tongue's end.

A thousand regiments stood ready to assemble and fight under Iyeyasu's colors, and no daimyo of position would raise the feeblest protest — though fully cognizant of the motive and bitterly regretting the coup — against the cry of:

"Out with the Christians!"

The edict had gone forth, and regardless of Iye-

yasu's intent no loyal defender, not a supporter of the taiko's regime, much less any true believer in the mikado, had failed to respond to a call so vital to their existence, as obnoxious to their ways of living and welfare in death. Those godly men, the priests, and their converts, by word and by deed, had proven themselves marauders and evil-boding. They had reached over men's consciences, struck at the state, and meddled with the home — and for what? To substitute one religion for another — and why?

“To gratify ambition,” replied Iyeyasu, and for once Christianity found a foe worthy its steel.

“This stupid pilot's inadvertent speech, he of the *San Felipe*, however petty, but echoes the cornerstone of a philosophy, disguised and spread as religion, intended to profit the sophisticated at the expense of the confiding,” continued he, reasoning with the court at Kyoto. “Why, they are already sniffing at the largest treasury in the empire, seek under the guise of patriots to invest the strongest fortress left us, and are poisoning the mind, as they abused a reliance, of our departed taiko's widow, the princess Yodogima; than whom, till their withering touch defiled, none better, purer, or more faithful lived. Give me this appointment, I say; influence our beloved mikado to make me shogun — Yoshiaki is dead and Minamoto blood is in me — and I shall oust them and close these doors to the world. Then, and not till then, shall peace reign in this most favored and only blessed domain.”

Enthusiasm bore them on, as it always does, when founded well, however conceived, and Iyeyasu thereat became shogun — an honor Hideyoshi had striven all his life, yet died to see lowering upon another.

“It proves nothing,” continued Iyeyasu, shrugging his shoulders, “except the value of blood, establishes the divinity of the mikado, and preserves to us the religion we know resolves in practice what it preaches. I pronounce it.”

Not so at Ozaka; Yodogima had looked as far into the working of social, religious, and political complexities as the sage of Yedo had thought to enter; understood the *San Felipe* threat equally as well, but regarded it rather as a source, not as much as any sort of finality — Yodogima knew better the hearts of men; as a woman, she had had an experience that no man can have: she believed that Iyeyasu’s act in seeking the shogunate were no less personal than had been Hideyoshi’s purpose in denying her the privileges of an inherent love; than the king of Spain’s motive was mercenary in speeding forth the missionaries.

“With transportation established, there is no end to greed, and Japan, if she would live, must open, and not close her doors. Does Iyeyasu think that God in his wisdom were so narrow as to exempt this tiny spot from the responsibilities and compensations everywhere else around us borne?” said the princess, to Hideyori, who had grown to respect his mother’s advice, and now sought it, before answering Iyeyasu’s

importuning him to proceed thither and do homage to the newly made shogun's attempted precedence.

"For every missionary sent to us," continued she, "let us send two to them; as they build ships, then double their output; if it is with arms they would grab, we have more than twice their number, the largest of them, and discipline to spare. Go against them my child; possession is the secret, and the fittest shall survive; it is God's law, and woe unto him who disobeys — Iyeyasu as well; he has denied me, and let come what may your mother will be vindicated."

Hideyori had just arrived at earliest manhood, and little did he care about anything so inane and deceptive as enforced peace, as unequal and degrading as discriminative prosperity. The old stock, the spirit of an age that did not lie, of men unstooped to a progress that would rob Peter to pay Paul, a civilization that had brought the West's proudest knocking at their doors, made them the coveted of all continents, these aspirations burned at his finger tips.

A mother had been wronged: what more could have fired a lesser zeal?

Trained by a man whose only thought was of his best interests, loved dearly by one who had given him being, applauded by a multitude, endowed of an authority, heir to vast treasures and supported by men of valor — who could have resisted the challenge to honor a name?

"Hideyori respects the honorable Iyeyasu, but cannot concede him the rank or authority claimed," was

the modest though significant answer returned, by the insulted heir to an exalted taiko's prestige.

"I am pleased," promised Iyeyasu, to Kitagira, directly his own best trusted intermediary; "Hideyori's refusal affords me the opportunity — awaited all these barren years."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AND with bated breath those captains, now scattered and broken, looked on, powerless to see and helpless to act. Yodogima threw open her doors to the patriots: Iyeyasu closed his against all but the wise, and no such cloud had risen since the days of Ashikaga.

“My daughter shall not become the wife of this stripling, Hideyori,” declared Esyo, at the shogun’s repeated threat.

“Yes she will,” replied he, coldly considering the prospects, from another standpoint altogether.

Esyo stared balefully at the floor, and Iyeyasu labored watchfully the trend of her reasoning; he would not force the issue at Ozaka, not just yet, and he knew that Yodogima would regard her sister’s feelings. A cloud, also, had risen in the direction of Jokoin. The banishment of the Christians had roused her ire, particularly as Takiyama had been ordered into seclusion, and with both sisters, his own sons, the Christians, and Yodogima against him the small prospect at hand of squeezing out the house of Hideyoshi would be forever dissipated.

“I am an old man, Esyo,” said he, after a short reflection, “and would make Hidetada my successor; suppose I do it now; resign, and persuade his appoint-

ment instead, as shogun; would it be asking too much in that event, to expect your reasonable consent to this marriage?"

Esyo deliberated. It had been her one ambition from the day she landed in Hideyoshi's camp, a victim if a meddler. Would she quit the pleasure of frustrating Yodogima, as she believed, to gain the eminence so long and craftily sought? The bare thought of needing to decide pained her; she would have snatched both, the gratification and the honor, but this Iyeyasu, her father-in-law, the shogun, had never been pressed to extremes, while in a corner, and she faltered.

"Upon one condition," concluded she, presently.

"That seems fair," chanced he; "what is it?"

"That you kill Hideyori."

"Before, or after?" inquired the shogun, without so much as smiling.

"Presumably you may think it as easily done," retorted she, the pride of blood, for the nonce, asserting some sort of peculiar sway.

The Taira, however, had measured swords with the Minamoto centuries before Esyo inadvertently condescended to vouchsafe this one lonely thrill, and Iyeyasu perhaps, therefore, sooner learned to attend the reckoning that awaited him, in this his final effort to dislodge an intrepid foe. Were the last fight to have been fought with a man, the battle-scarred Iyeyasu had buckled on his armor, and gladly; but look as he might, heed whom he chose, Yodogima,

a love of his and an offspring of theirs, rose up, out of the smoldering embers, to bid and to challenge.

"My God! I cannot face her — oh, yes; I can; she is nothing to me — curse the Christians! I'll slay them —"

"No you won't," threatened Jokoin, in her way, having entered shortly after Esyo's withdrawal, in the course of the hearer's meditation; "they've got powder to burn, of a right good quality — just in from Hirado, the foreigners' hold out — and a pound of it is worth a lot of valor —"

"I'll double the price; tell your friends that Iyeyasu is in the market for powder."

"And a wife, as well. But you can't have Yodogima; she's given you the mit."

"Silence, child; will you never use modesty; you are in the presence of the shogun?"

"Oh, I wonder — indeed I'm not; you have no right to be shogun, and what isn't right isn't; there now! I shall take my orders from Hideyori: perhaps marry him, if Takiyama, Goto, Sanada, and all the rest worth while —"

"You have a husband."

"So have you a wife; and, what is more, my husband is willing; and, I am sure, you can't say as much; and, better still, Esyo wants her daughter to marry Kyogoku — don't you think you could use him; he is as good as forty women, at that?"

"Kyogoku! Perhaps — he may know more about them than I do," sighed the shogun, hopelessly en-

tangled, undoing the riddle she had unwound for his special edification. "I'll let you off, however; though, I ought to send you as company for Takiyama."

"Send me? I'd like to see you do it; banish me, if you dare!"

"I'll harness the whole of you, if you don't mind your p's and q's. And to convince you that I mean just what I say I am this very day going to send the infant daughter of Hidetada, together with a retinue, to Ozaka. No doubt you yourself will have advised Hideyori — whom I have had appointed Nai-dai-jin — in advance something of my expectations so that he may be prepared to take my granddaughter as wife upon arrival. I shall, out of consideration for you, forego any more forceful intelligence."

"He shall do nothing of the kind, is not a nai-dai-jin, nor will Yodogima harbor your spies — not if I can prevent it. Neither do I care to be bored with your concern for me."

"Oh, ho — there are worse lovers."

"None as inane, whom I know."

"Tut, tut — louder and more of it."

"You haven't begun to hear from me."

"No?"

"N-o-o-? — I'm off."

The shogun had not misjudged Jokoin, in the least, yet did not wish at all to enforce any kind of restraint. Unable to fathom Esyo, there was danger of estranging Hidetada himself — for the wife had quite dominated and held him verily subject to her own stronger

will — while Hideyasu, not yet wholly without some influence, still refused to become entirely reconciled to his naturally unexpected displacement. There were, also, rumors around that certain of the captains and daimyos who had sided with him as against Ishida were growing nervous about his attitude toward the taiko's heir. Whether it were because of their own jealousies, or due to Yodogima's influence, he could not satisfactorily determine, as indited; he had rewarded them all, liberally, for their services, if deserving, while the princess had estranged some by her friendliness to Harunaga; whatever the case the breach must be held over till his forces had been raised and insured to the likelihood of Yodogima's. His contention about the Christians had enthused the populace, but open hostilities against Hideyori, so soon after, would certainly lose him the advantage at first gained.

Diplomacy were his most available instrument, just then, however drastic the conclusive threshing.

"Are you certain about this boy, Hideyori's incapacity, Kitagira?" inquired he — soon after Jokoin had left — doubtfully. "You have persistently told me that he were no match for Hidetada; I should like to know, of my own knowledge; cannot you arrange a meeting?"

"One thing at a time, my lord; if he marry your granddaughter, what better proof need anyone?"

"Just so. Therefore see you that the marriage take place."

Kitagira made no answer, but drawing his own

conclusions, from that last answer, as to the shogun's own capableness, trudged off toward Ozaka, with the intentionally betrothed in his arms, fully decided upon escaping to his own miserably allotted fief, should he fail of the mission imposed.

At Ozaka a storm of protest went up from all but Yodogima. She had threatened something worse. Esyo arriving first, Jokoin after, and the trundled granddaughter lastly, everybody had had ample occasion to hit upon something—save alone Iyeyasu; who by remaining at home surveyed better the feelings engendered with the ruse.

“Take the brat away,” shouted Kyogoku, still vigilant at the gate.

“No,” commanded Yodogima; “let the mother decide; she is present, and of right should elect a daughter's husband.”

“I can save you trouble,” suggested Hideyori; reluctantly, however, for the baby looked pretty; “I am already engaged —”

“To Jokoin,” interposed Harunaga; “I have the mikado's permission.”

A storm of applause followed upon the one side, occasioning as violent denunciation from the other. No one except the shogun had for a long time so much as thought of profaning the precincts of celestial Kyoto, let alone essaying to voice a message thus sacredly emanating.

“Who is this Harunaga?” demanded Fukushima, most cruel and savage, an old captain of the guard

and relative to Oyea, but not averse to Christian tolerance. "What right has he to put words into the mouth of a taiko's son?"

Kuroda, still older, and more devoted to the sympathies of Yodogima, grumbled accordance.

Esyo held her tongue; she wanted her daughter — strange to believe, except as she knew — married to Kyogoku, and deemed it best not to interfere.

"Oh, I guess, you are not so much, Mr. Fukushima; we have Sanada, Goto, and a few more equally as reliable; if you want to rebel, I think we shall be able to make out; what say you, Esyo?" put in Jokoin, boastfully.

"I give my daughter to Kyogoku."

"What? He is married," threatened Kitagira, nervously.

"He can divorce me," replied Jokoin, concernedly.

"Without authority?" inquired Kyogoku, gasping at some vain law instead of a better wit.

"I have it, and shall use it," declared Hideyori.

"You have not been appointed, are not an official," reasoned Fukushima.

"Yes, he has; he is nai-dai-jin; Iyeyasu just now told me so, and I am sure an Interior Great Minister can do anything he likes," threatened Jokoin, more confident than discreet.

They all ran about with glee, those of the Christians present; that one so near conversion, as Hideyori, had been raised to some exalted position were enough to enthuse them; but Yodogima meditated; the con-

fusion thereat had left her as doubtful as Iyeyasu had been perplexed with Jokoin's entanglement. Yet she would not restrain Hideyori in his exultation from irretrievably committing himself by exercising only once the authority; she wanted to accommodate her sisters, especially Esyo, and perhaps Jokoin — possibly herself — so the power was invoked.

Iyeyasu laughed when informed of the circumstance, and sending for Jokoin, told her that now he should encounter little discouragement in winning her over.

"I want you to be my wife, Jokoin," said he, without a wrinkle or a quaver; you are the last of the family, and are single again; what say you to feasting Hideyori: don't you think he might be gotten rid of in some such way?"

Jokoin's eyes opened wide. The sister to Yodogima had never heard that one's former lover talk in that way before. It seemed impossible that the great Iyeyasu, an unsuspected character, if self-inflicted shogun, a lifelong aspirant to her sister's hand, should so belittle himself as to banter respect howevermuch else.

"I shall speak with Yodogima; you overwhelm me," replied Jokoin, dumfounded at her own sensibility.

"Please do; tell her that I wish to marry you; that I would spread a befitting feast; that I beseech a fool to attend; that Hideyori may judge of what he has missed; that your extravagance would swamp a younger man — all this, and more: say that Esyo, her

sister, wants to kill Hideyori, and that I know of no better means of encompassing that event."

Jokoin hurried away, fully determined never to return; the ghost of Hideyori already betokened a reality at every turn in the road, and from the moorland hard by arose the whisperings and the wailings of a repentant sister — Eryo's voice rang ominously in her ears.

Yodogima, contrary to expectations, brightened at the thought of sending Hideyori into the enemy's camp. He had shown himself the man to foil Iyeyasu's contemplated espionage at its inception: what greater capacity might be discovered if brought face to face with a man whose extremity had induced so flagrant a mouthing.

"Tell Iyeyasu that Hideyori shall attend with pleasure, not his marriage revel, but more the witless unmaking of as pampered a braggadocio as an humbler memory of Hideyoshi and Nobunaga combined might have fairly conducted. Tell him that he would eat the rice-cake these two worthies made; but in the doing he shall choke for lack of throat. Let him know that Yodogima lives, and so long as there is a Taira alive justice shall be done: no man's religion is to be the occasion of his persecution, my sisters may do as their God tells them to do, and Hideyori must reign."

"I couldn't remember to say all that, at once, and I had rather remain here," sighed Jokoin, her great opened-up eyes dancing at the prospect.

Sitting there unconscious of another obligation, Yodogima considered also her resources. Though re-

membering well the countenance of Kuroda, and Fukushima's measured words, on that memorable morning, she could but believe them true to their trust. To her way of thinking, no more probable course had conformed to an aim attainable; the life she lived breathed, at every stride, of action, invariable; their traditions known so well, Buddha's precepts, and Christ's faith all cried in her ears, "do," "do," "do"; a constant struggle had made her what she was — the face of Shin Hachiman (statue of Hideyoshi, the new War God) looked down from its pedestal at Kyoto, imploring her to stay the hand of Iyeyasu: how becomingly could a faithful wife, and a mother, have concluded otherwise?

"Then Hideyori may pronounce it, at the banquet table; he is my son, and the worthy mouthpiece of a nobler purpose than feasting."

CHAPTER XXIX

THEY had gathered in sumptuous splendor, round the laden trays, with Iyeyasu in place and Hideyori at his left, as became an honored guest. Kitagira was there, too; he had been discovered hiding at Ibaraki, and in consideration of Hideyori's presence was allowed or compelled to witness the shogun's placing of his own valuation.

With being told that Hideyori had not the intelligence to cope with Hidetada, and deciding that only Yodogima stood between himself and ultimate supremacy, Iyeyasu estimated carefully the former, and planned the necessity of immediate action against the latter.

He had grown old in the harness, would thence witness a widening of the channel: the prop that he had visioned must inure to the swift, for Hideyori justified a mother's confidence.

The lotus studding the ponds below lagged lazily in the breeze that fanned them off the coast at Ozaka. Softened evidences of his good taste toned and inspired every nook and cranny of those immaculate halls and safely trodden grounds, but steel had marked each turn toward their advance. Must steel again assert superiority? Would he die fighting? Why should man at first despise, then relish, the olive? In his younger days Iyeyasu, too, had balked at culture, but with rip-

ened years it had become a slogan, compelling, all-forceful, and inevitable.

"I'll crush him, untutored man, vain infant, inspired mongrel; endowed with better wit than I, he lacks only the wisdom — but his mother! Oh, well; she might as well be Christian, and dangle her bells at church; the taiko's jingle shall be split, and men can very well spare their better halves, in the pursuit of a less obstreperous divertisement —

"Hideyori, my lad, what do you think of women?"

"They are the pendulum in a clock."

"Pouff! I'll make cogs and spindles of them. Kitagira, show this young man thence he came, and send Hidetada hither; I am satisfied; either of you have more brains than pluck; the sword is master, and not a balancer. Hence; and let me strike while the blood yet runs hot; I have neither time to wait nor patience to woe a goddess that isn't mine; Ozaka must fall."

"I thank you for the entertainment, also for losing your head, horonable host," vouchsafed Hideyori, in parting; "the former, because it is meet to respect gray hairs: the latter, that honest men may make due denfense. You need not spare Kitagira, or his kind, for escort; a newer generation makes it possible for me to leave here, not as you once entered there — in a woman's palanquin — but as the defender of my own fortune, and the builder of a nation's hope — both the usefulness and the sacredness of mothers: no less their motherhood."

Hideyori withdrew, the more a man, if such had been his failing. His elder at arms and with diplomacy, had thrown to the winds all the finer notions that the younger had been taught about man's province and woman's part. Look as he would into the fading realities of a living yesterday, adjure from scenes imagined against the dawning to-morrow as he did, the one thought that man is a free agent and behold-ing only to the God that lives within drove him toward his destiny like the thundering waters of a mighty gorge leap and laugh their way to the calm and peace always lying somewhere in the untimed, but certain beyond. And as he tramped along, looking to the right and to the left, there appeared myriads of living atoms answering to the same call that so eagerly gladdened his step, and when the sun burst through, upon these, their faces turned heavenward — only the dead and unborn failed a natural appeal, Amaterasu had written Iyeyasu down, and the younger man hastened to accept the responsibility.

“Woman a slave to man, men the creature of state, and the state no better than a mechanism? Hearken not the vulture, but to arms: Christ died upon the cross; let these hills and valleys grow green in the blood of Hideyori; a mother's will and not a father's way is the final test of a beginningless God.”

Harunaga had taught him better than Yodogima believed; there lay behind his spirit an abiding dis-taste for anything and everything smacking of un-earned felicity; the getting of something by sufferance

were a crime; profit at the expense of some other man's effort betokened inanity; the trading of wares or of benefits lay beneath him; commercialism was robbery, and diplomacy worse; deception belonged to the devil, and God had always won, must always win.

The bribe, therefore, offered to him, by Iyeyasu, the master fibber, the safe, sane, and sound merchant of goods and other things, had no effect upon the high-born, reënergized, and rightly tutored Hideyori. The sop thrown out by the one to the other, of accepting new territories in exchange for real manhood — as in the case of Iyeyasu, of Hideyoshi, thence past — fell upon deaf ears; as had the attempt to seduce Yodogima, his mother, with privileges of building temples, casting bells, and otherwise demeaning herself according to the predetermined notions of the man who would use her for a plaything.

"I cannot express my love for you," promised she, to her idol, upon his return and the departure of their two hostages, held as a guarantee; "you convince me that there is something better in man than the greed of instinct. Possession is the ultimate goal, but of the heart and not the belly — hence harakari is a virtue and no man would despoil the fountain-head. But, my son, have you considered well the means?"

"Yes, mother — truth is invincible."

"Yet it, like all nature, is subject to hindrances; the waters tumbling down their natural courses are oft-times retarded with log-jams, the banks break, and the producing land is flooded."

“Only for the inevitable good of their enforced fertilization.”

“Are you sure that we, in our day, do not confront the immediate necessity of such replenishment? Are the rice-fields abundant, the dikes strong, and the waters free?”

“Let me answer with a question: if the fields are hungry, will denial, deception, or putting off, stay the hand of reckoning? Is it making history to shoulder posterity with the evil of to-day’s cowardice? Is it manly? Is it godlike? If so, then we, too, can make-shift honorably. If not, I would crush the hydra-headed monster in his den. Let him not, through our stupidity, carelessness, or cursedness, fasten his tentacles upon the unborn—most compelling of God’s previsioning—sons and daughters in whom alone we shall survive hell and attain heaven.”

Yodogima bowed in her son’s presence; she could not speak for the pride arising out of a greater sentiment; words would have voiced the colder side of life; attributes only of the soul moved her to make some recognition of this fancied, hoped-for, and willed higher reach. All the felicities of a life earnestly lived seemed answered in that one likened expression. Then why should he have burdened her with further obligation? What lacked she yet of the great circle that encompasses creation?

“Do not bow, my mother,” requested he, his voice modulated as if to penetrate deeper than heart; “it is I who should kneel; maternity is the keynote of

existence, and when it has thought to command, and not obey, men shall have reached indeed the threshold of greatness. Arise, that I may do what in the future men shall learn of necessity."

"Must I, too, do service?"

"Yes; it is ordained of equality."

"Then I'll do it, and see you, each, that his spear is in order, for the battle shall be to the quick."

Before Hideyori could at all respond, Jokoin snatched up the bugle, and running to the rampart's edge, blew a blast that brought the loyal speeding; no live man would fail a summons as vital: the one call that has lifted antiquity's veil, makes the day worth its enduring, and rouses better expectations of the future: Sanada shouted:

"Let me fight; the princess forsees, and progression is her right," and Goto, Ono, the young and the vigorous, those patriots and their martyrs, Christian or Pagan, rallied to the defense of liberty.

Only Kuroda, Fukushima, and the hirelings of content, their kind, refused accession to Yodogima's stand.

"When you are as old as we, the wells of enthusiasm shall have dried," whined they, walking out at the gate — thrown open by Kyogoku, the instrument of Esyo — regretting only that their convenience and Yodogima's indiscretion made it more delectable for them to break an uncrossed faith than perform a sworn duty.

They walked out, and others came in, in legion.

The Christians responded, to a man, and no such stalwart soldiery had before gathered — in any cause. The edict against these Christians, on the one hand, and the attempt upon Hideyori, on the other, had brought to Yodogima's support a force and a promise that jarred for once the understanding of Iyeyasu. Policy had been his stronghold, from the first; the one battle risked and fought, at Sekigahara, had been forced and won at the instance of Yodogima, and the reaper of its booty knew it, had extended his hand as recompense, and in the frenzy of madness brought about an unthought catastrophe, seemingly as needless as destructive.

Only the pinched of face and sycophant at heart surrounded him now; men waxing corpulent, and others anxious to coddle them; the philosopher because he could afford to be one; possessors of endowed chairs at colleges, the gifts of one another; builders of libraries, in the hope of perpetuating doubtful memories; merchant princes, and financial jugglers, these and their like, who lap for favors, jostled each other in the crying of peace — that their interests might not be disturbed.

Iyeyasu looked them over.

“And this is what Hideyoshi's democracy really developed! A war, and all the men at the enemy's beck and call. Had I Yodogima's strength I'd close these doors — but I can; I'll make the barons defend their own vested interests. Diplomacy shall yet avail the state,” resolved he, cold and set.

“Esyo?”

“What is it,” demanded she.

“Tell Yodogima that Iyeyasu would like to call, in conference, at her pleasure. Will you do me the kindness?”

“Yes, honorable father-in-law. When, please?”

“Forthwith, my good Esyo.”

Esyo went, but delivered instead an ultimatum.

“I came to thank you for the loan of Kyogoku, Yodogima,” said she, artfully.

“But he played me a trick?”

“Did you expect more?”

“No; not of him; but of you.”

“And you shall not be disappointed; you may keep the infant; women are cheap, and shoguns dear — do you observe the pattern, of my gown, Yodogima? I trust I wear it, becomingly, you perceive?”

“Yes, Esyo; I understand, now. It has taken me a long time to believe a sister could play another false — you have my protection beyond the lines, and my best wishes always: tell your father-in-law that I accept his challenge, and that war alone can determine the issue.”

Esyo could not await her own return, so couriers were advanced with the intelligence. Upon her arrival, much excitement but little enthusiasm lingered at Fushima. Kuroda, Fukushima, and others of the daimyos were there in council with Iyeyasu — the new shogun, Hidetada, had already prepared to march.

“It is your fault, Kuroda, and Fukushima, and you my spineless schemers, that hostilities have begun, and —”

“Cannot their leaders be bought?”

“You shall have to fight, or surrender to the Christians; Yodogima is not purchasable.”

Levies were hastened forward, and the treasures brought in; Iyeyasu had succeeded, and greed for once stood compelled to surrender its power unto determined men, or subject themselves to the leadership of a man who hated no less the influence of plethoratic wealth upon state than dreaded the consequences of a partial democracy among men. The Christians had become the instrument; and diplomacy proved the means with which Iyeyasu divided the nation and equipped himself to enforce centralization.

Yodogima had builded upon broader lines: her star seemed the brighter.

CHAPTER XXX

WAR had been declared, the decisive battle faced them, and neither side underestimated the other's strength nor neglected his own best possible recourse. Yodogima and Iyeyasu, two lovers at heart, loomed the more formidable as enemies, measuring each other in the luminous cauldron of a perfect understanding, and did not their souls unite in the attainment of a common, supreme, an overwhelming obligation — the means as widely divergent as the uplift had been ideal — courage had failed either, and humanity must have lost a most ardently conceived, if untimely wrought, exemplification.

At her left, the sun rose clear and commanding, behind the hills of Nara, where the sages had lived and died unto the days of myth, perhaps when Jimmu landed a wanderer from burdens escaped, or as descended of the gods in heaven. Memories of these things inspired Yodogima. The sacredness of its soil compelled thoughts farther away than of to-day.

A thousand temples commemorated events that would not yield to the onrush of ambition or the more potent realities of an every-day humdrum; bonzes gray and firm chanted music both sacred and dear behind those walls scattered here and there throughout the rugged fastness to and beyond this Nara, the seat of the best that God, in his fairness, had inspired;

birds soared statelier here, the odor of flowers smelled more authentic, and the stones stubborn puzzled their reading; no man ventured into these hallowed mysteries without a deeper sense of the responsibilities that fade and shadow as we trudge or falter the stepping liege of escaping time, and out of its depths there arose a force as restraining.

Over to the westward, the passions and the penalties crowded hard and fast those of realistic now; not a man of them spared the energy of a thought or wended the loss of a step toward that past and gone, or measured in other than dollars and cents the future and its dependence, as against an always tardy, yet fast-running present; shop or hovel, land and water, man or beast, the cultured and the uncultured, jammed and fretted in one continuous roar commercial. What compensations, for such turmoil! A million souls dwarfed into no higher recompense than thirst to own, hunger to appease, and only death to relieve it all. No glad messages trumpeted their tired and aimless steps, serving or served, the plethoric rich and the indigent poor, the hopeful or the despairing alike groped, ran, or loafed their allotted space in its empty, beggarly passing.

Yodogima prayed for these; they lay sadly beyond any more helpful, if grateful, equivalent.

But to the front, looking southward, broad vistas of undulated expanse led on, over the rice fields and into areas bordered with the blue of ocean's tireless, unpolluted energies. At her back reared mighty walls

and sank deeper the moats — no intruder might strike there ; but here, in the foreground, upon unsullied soil, underneath her own surveillance, in the very bosom of their stronghold, the battle must be fought.

The hosts were already gathering : Sanada led them ; he had tasted of the blood sacrificial ; fought his way to Uyeda, in the teeth of Hideyasu's avenging ; his father gave him the choice, of following Iyeyasu or donning the new : in him, young and active, there had risen fresher desires, fervid, if inconsiderate.

“Let us fight,” he had said, replying to Jokoin's trumpeting, and in view of these energies had been given command, under Hideyori, the chief, counselled by Harunaga, more matured than either, directed by Yodogima, their princess — trusted, if not worshipped.

Were she then, to them, Christian or Pagan, as much as goddess ; or should the future, yet, reveal some deeper hidden truth ?

“It is good to behold confidences as liberally bestowed,” vowed Yodogima, to Jokoin, who came up to share, in her way, the picture unfolding, “albeit, the responsibility ; Hideyori can well acquit himself, but these Christians — so wrought in faith, hopeful, and charitable : withal unknowing, helpless, and confiding. I must not lose this contest ; they are no match for the colder ethics of Orientalism : yet were not placed here to go down martyrs, or to eke out materialistically — their religion is not at fault so much, as it

is inadequate, undeveloped, short of finality. The circle is incomplete."

"Nor shall we fail, though defeated," chimed in the good sister; there are more ways than one, to skin a cat, and we'll dodge, as sure as whipped. You can bet on Christ, every time; he's a winner, and the world has just got to kowtow."

"What makes you talk that way, Jokoin? One would think the Old Nick himself had the better hold — and I am sure you were not as you are till something made you so: was it Christianity?"

"How do I know? I just feel that way, and what's the use of bothering? Why ask? Just go in, to win; that's the game, to lose — well, I won't say what it's like, but the name spells horrors!"

"And if I should fail?"

"You can't — not as long as I am left; I'd eat fire, for you; that is my religion."

"Thank you, sister; but — well, I was going to say, that that sounds more like the Taira. I wonder if the Coming could have had any connection — do you see those plains, Jokoin? There is a hill, near the center: is there a Cross there; I cannot quite make out: your Vision may be stronger than mine?"

"I couldn't see half so far; besides, I'd miss the fun of going, if I did; there's somebody there, now; it's Hideyori; I'm off; so long."

Yodogima, however serious or busied, could not resist the infection, and with Jokoin's bounding down

the slope for the time being lost control, as it were, of herself.

“What buoyancy,” mused she; “if the world could imbibe the half of hers, there wouldn’t be anything but mock — yes, make-believe — fighting done. And then — oh; it is too absurd; man is not a laughing stock. Nero may have grimaced his way into Rome, but its hills shall drench still yet with the tears he shed.”

And back at Fushima, far removed from Ozaka, and its elemental forces, at work upon plans and defences, as indefatigable as laudable, a more conscienceless, less movable coterie of individuals, the shapening parts to a masterful piece of mechanism, their features wan and purses opened, the whip-lash laid or tackles baited — these, barons by profession and soldiers of compulsion, haters in fact, yet supporters for safety — they, under extremes, busied their bodies with replenishing the commissary and recruiting the ranks of an army as different in character as it were essential to habit.

No thought of daringness conserved the interests of these shouters for peace, at any price save its legitimate cost. Every reformer in their eyes became at once a disturber; patriotism were charlatanism, and the knowing ones cried down as demagogues; they shouted plenty and practiced penuriousness, gorged themselves and bade others be satisfied with the crumbs — or their lot.

Such were the motley hordes gathered to render

Ieyasu master — and he had learned a lesson; knew the kind of discipline these fellows relished, and gave them their due — hunger. To feed, then, or to keep, as well, these hirelings, or their hirers, drilled and coddled, marched or trudged upon Ozaka.

“Poor humans; I pity you,” sighed Yodogima; Ieyasu dragged after, as uncertain as dogged.

CHAPTER XXXI

LONG lines of coerced, machine-made, and let-live mortals wended the broadening valleys leading from the seat of empire, Kyoto's mouldering gate, Fushima, toward the walled-in adjuster, Ozaka, under whose shelter there throbbed in every archer and each spearman the impulse that leads to liberty.

A mighty task confronted these invaders, the mercenary half of a nation. Obedience to an over-mastery had become their watchword; through long ages the spark that enlightens had been drubbed and coaled into nothing more than the droll leaden heat of an improvident toll, and the hills on either side echoed from one to the other only such monotonous rhythm as dulled or tinkled in the ears of baser content or lulled to sleep any instinct born of more than earth's paid transient competence.

"Law and order is the order and the law," growled Iyeyasu, as the last one of those corpulent commanders eased back upon the tired, stooped shoulders bearing him hence — to what and where only the lost and fading records of regardful time could or would flaunt in the faces of a blushing posterity.

"Are the spears sharp," demanded he, when the train had as diligently ranked apace.

"I'll inquire, sir," responded the orderly, thinking only of the wage he had contracted — and the echo

answering back, from the farthest spoke in the wheel, sounded like :

“All’s well, sir.”

“Avast! I warrant,” muttered Iyeyasu, “not one of them knows the meaning, however prodded or ribbed. A heartless task, this; and, I do believe the soul cries — but to the work :

“Forward, march!” and the drive began; the machine creaked; the master builder, however, oiled methodically its thirsty bearings and adjusted as economically the squeaking parts.

“It’s a time-keeper, if ugly,” muttered he, as the trodden ground, too, responded with agony to the listless demands of an overly candid, if seldom understood, “tramp, tramp, tramp” — and the knowing few, constant criers of, “hands off, hands off, hands off,” paled at the prospect of their own befouling — Christ’s blood bore no relation to the parboiling blue of their ensemble; Pontius had exemplified the wiser conduct.

Anxious hearts and eager eyes, over there, on the other side, amid the burnings and yearnings of betterment, atop privilege and opposed to lying, their honor at stake and a lighted beacon in the hand, singing songs of gladness and shouting defiance at sin, a mission to perform and life ahead — these were the men and women who manned the ship whose supercargo responds only to healthful dictation and whose decks are freighted with the fragrant odor of valorous deeds.

“Let the work be quickly done,” advised Yodogima,

high at the helm's guidance, aloft the citadel of manlier entente. "Strike the vibrating thing at its weakest point, and when these carping conservatives shall have once scented the cost of healthier action their flagrant confidence must fall of its own overweight. The very thought is shocking, but truth is most obvious: the only way to rid a body is to gouge an evil growth. Your hearts are strong; see that you strike deep, and nobly."

Not a man faltered, no one questioned his rations; the prize savored of freedom, the penalties were of trifling consideration, and these men deployed their forces with a vim and an assurance that sounded afar the masked countenance of those they defied.

Kuroda and Fukushima hearkened, sickening at their own stupid estimate. The two of them, lifelong servers of a better fortune, respected supporters of Hideyoshi, had sworn, sealing the oath with their own blood, to defend and uphold the cause that Hideyori, an infant, had inherited and Yodogima, his mother, now sought with fearless energy to conserve, that Hideyoshi, the builder, had inaugurated, and that Nobunaga, a beginner, had conceived. A terrible retribution bore down hard, as their foolish mistake and her upright stand fairly began to dawn. Committed and hemmed in, there seemed no escape — Iyeyasu solved the problem.

"Banished," snarled he, to Hidetada, his chief counsellor, and in the presence of other barons assembled for that purpose; "and that their example may prove

salutary, in the case of any like minded or weak kneed, it is my instruction that you kill these upon the slightest show of rebellion. To Yedo with them, and dagger athwart."

Only Maeda, the younger, responded; he had witnessed the dispatch of his father, sometime guardian over Hideyori, and jumping to his feet, vowed undying fidelity to Iyeyasu; he knew the forced intriguer's methods, perhaps divined some advantage in his tactics, for he had inherited untouched his father's estates, if not a better security — Iyeyasu then made him head commander, under Hidetada, his chief, subject only to himself as dictator, obeyed, if despised.

"Then it is Maeda that Iyeyasu, a wooer, would pit against my Sanada, a patriot?" replied Yodogima, when advised of the circumstance — no doings on either side escaped her; Kyogoku, now, again, for the one, and Honda, Iyeyasu's secretary, with the other, proved good intelligencers, if shaky, or resolute, otherwise. "Perhaps he, Maeda, too, will have changed somewhat when he has unexpectedly discovered that smoking powder, and not farmers' arrows, await him. Sanada may sleep at the gate, but Maeda shall never cross these walls — no doubt there are others in Iyeyasu's train of the same mind as Kuroda and Fukushima: we shall see, well before the wise Iyeyasu has bought or defeated a man of mine; freedom and failure are antithetical in fact."

Ridding his camp of the last, as he believed, who dared shake at the knees, and shouldering the remain-

ing daimyos with the brunt of fighting and danger, keeping his own immediate levies, the Tokugawas, in reserve at the rear, where neither spear or arrow nor powder and shot could do them harm, Iyeyasu gave out the orders:

“Form a semicircle, the rest of you, my doubtful daimyos — I shall test your backbones; single-handed, and with no shelter available, you shall fight or turn traitor; Yodogima’s methods and mood are well known — from Settsu to Idzumi, surrounding from shore to shore the enemy’s grounds: they will hardly take to the water; there are no ships available: Maeda shall lead well round the Yamato (Nara) hills and approaching Ozaka from the south, with Hidetada at his rear and myself close after, strike them at their strongest point. The arm is strong, we have two to their one, and every hot-head fallen is an abiding guarantee of peace. It is a shame that these beautiful engines of war should needs be put to use, but — well, I have exhausted every recourse to bring Hideyori to my way of thinking: he is foolishly ambitious, wickedly rooted, and must be removed.”

Two hundred thousand of them thus moved upon Yodogima, the mother, perhaps responsible for some of Hideyori’s real traits, however misjudging or particular Iyeyasu had taken it upon himself to be. Nor had she been less pronounced in her convictions.

“Remove the cause for all this war paraphernalia, and the effect shall be at once to relieve humanity of its needless building: the very best way to do that is to

use well what we have got — here and elsewhere, now, before our resources shall have been exhausted with trying to bluff each other," she had said to Iyeyasu, repeatedly, upon his showing the white feather, to Hideyoshi, his earliest rival.

They came on, these derelicts, of duty, their banners waving and mouths sustaining, the advancing heavy-weights skirting the mountains to the eastward, with the singly doled daimyos holding down their respective posts as assigned. Yodogima surveyed the situation, as she could, from her central position. The semicircle occasioned no uneasiness; as she surmised — Iyeyasu had overlooked it — every one of them considered his place a most advantageous roost from which to observe results in front, sliding down on either side as convenience should dictate.

They did serve their would-be master, however, in quite another respect: their absence relieved Iyeyasu of the necessity of lumbering more than Maeda's contingent around those hills and over the plains, where bubbled the waters and grew the seed Yodogima had sprung or sown in lavish abundance. Patriots were budding like cherries in springtime, and a driven march but made the fragrance smell the sweeter.

Now, Maeda swung into the open, a formidable army loomed to the southward, and Yodogima breathed easier; her estimate thus far had proven correct; the attack would come as expected; Iyeyasu had employed the only tactics he knew — Sanada apparently slept at the nearest gate.

Directly across the intended battlefield, well in advance of the outer moat, running from the water front on the right to the river Nekogawa at her left, a low embankment, some ten feet in height, had been unexpectedly thrown up and faced of rock, with a deep water-trap hugging the farthest side, from end to end.

The invaders mistook this to be the outer moat: the patriots lay low, behind Sanada; who, to their astonishment, only snored.

Then, Hidetada wheeled his van, the flower of Yedo, well onto the plain; they were loyal men, but as yet in the measurement, as to their fullest capacity; the commander-in-chief had recruited of the newer Tokugawa, and any sudden charge might be expected to stampede the whole, in case of Maeda's rout, in advance — Harunaga, mobilized just inside the last regular moat, at the right-hand gate, awaiting only a chance.

Yodogima had not as much confidence in his boldness, as respect for his courage; their strategy, like the enemy's valor, must abide younger heads or hearts than those of Harunaga and Iyeyasu.

Lastly, Iyeyasu showed his face, and the veterans of his experience, samurai tried and found true, on many a scarred and fought-to-the-finish contest, their steps more studied and ears better cocked, these trustees ranked in, on the farthest side of the broad open, still beyond, in the rear. This, then, were the division that Hideyori, young and untried, should meet, if

needs be, in a final determination of their destinies: the decisive conflict of an age.

Hideyori at the beginning: Iyeyasu at the end of a career.

"It is blood against experience, and who would change it?" half whispered, half shouted Yodogima, a mother, as she swept the horizon with those eyes that had never failed her, looked into the faces which had gathered, and drilled, and armed, in behalf of manliness.

"My dear men," said she, turning to them, from her seat above, "you cannot fail. Whatever may become of me, however I or mine may demean himself, manhood is the secret buried underneath or revealed of any and every godlike doctrine, thought, or action. It is Godly, and the trend of the devil is toward the flesh. A strong heart knows its haven: a weak one abides the fires that consume. Manhood has made this world what it is, perhaps soared here, to this, from planets above; is making the world of to-day, however prosperous lying may seem; shall continue to make it, till there remains no need of a hell — thus and then, only, may heaven be attained. On with the work, and let no guilty thing escape!"

Iyeyasu, too, had spoken; climbing to a hill-top, Chausu, close at hand, on the right, the would-be besieger levelled his glasses, scanning the field before him. His own division of some sixty thousand samurai occupied the open lying between the hill on which he stood and the sea to the left; on the extreme

opposite side of the field to his right stood Hidetada and his army of equal size, extending on toward the eastward, till the hill Okayama, rearing up as a sentinel, shut out all intervening space between his forces and the river Hirano: the top of which hill afforded also the commander-in-chief, Hidetada, a most excellent vantage point.

At the extreme front, toward the center, lay Maeda, with his perhaps forty thousand Kaga bloods, including their allies, ready to do when bid. To his, Maeda's, right and to his left, spanning the distance from Hirano river, the eastern field border, to the sea at the west, stretched, together with his own — an intended battering ram — minor forces of the doubtful daimyos who had been placed to form the famed semicircle, as well as such others as had been brought up to strengthen the contemplated charge. Still in front of all, near by, lay the small hill Sasayama, coveted by Maeda, but held as an outpost by Sanada — apparently sleeping, farther on, at the gate post.

“We have the foe, safe enough, in front of us: our rear is free from molestation,” chuckled Iyeyasu, to Hidetada, his son, who had come over, in the evening, to consult about the proposed early morning attack. “With the enemy before them and the Tokugawa behind, what chance have these dilatory daimyos of ours? Why, they'll be chowdered before the sun is risen.”

“Then Hidetada shall pounce upon the foe with the freshness of morning,” replied he, elated, if over-

anxious, "and before the dew is fairly dried they shall have gone, to their happy hunting-ground."

"Well said, my son," ejaculated the forgetful hero of Sekigahara, "and Iyeyasu shall dine in Ozaka."

"Alone, father?"

"Why do you ask; have I ever denied you, my boy?"

"Oh; I had another thought in mind."

"It had been better, were it a view."

"I don't just like, so very much, fighting in the dark; but, as it may take the enemy some time to obliterate Maeda — and the rest of them, the sneaking daimyos' lines — I may not have to expose myself, till daylight, at best," surmised Hidetada, the Taira-wed branch of the family, descended Minamoto.

Iyeyasu made no answer; he could not, had he tried; Yodogima rose to mind, and he thought only of what might have been, had he but taken advantage of Hideyoshi's bluffing, long ago, at Fuchu, the elder Maeda's once upon a time seat of true chivalry. Esyo had in fact, as observed, exercised an influence over her husband: what might not the sister have done, had she been the mother."

"Oh, well; it is too late, now," muttered the taiko's once trusted ally, giving the order, in reality, for an unrecalable, before-the-day-break assault; then staggering to the ground, helplessly, under the weight of his own remorseful thirst, as he did the quenchless deed. "Stab; yes, stab her, too!"

And Yodogima answered, that final test, as became a weaker hand, if stronger heart.

Fog clouds hung low, the darkness grew intense, and these men could scarcely see their way; dread uncertainty had laid hold on shrivelled hearts; Maeda's advance groped its way round the hill Sasayama; Maeda and some few others climbed up.

"Where is he?" asked they, of one another; "these grounds seem deserted."

"Hark!" ventured someone.

"Did you hear that snore?" inquired another.

"It is Sanada; he sleeps; over there; at the outer castle gate; let us strike him; he is foolish."

They stumbled forward, in the darkness, and coming upon a man propped against a stake, Date prodded him; this dainyo had been doing similar service since the days of Odawara.

"What are you doing here; do you not know that we are enemies?" inquired Mori, another of Hideyoshi's upon-a-time staunch supporters.

"I wait to see, that we make no mistake; we have some farmers' arrows to shoot with, but would do no harm, to a friend."

"Hear you," said they, all alike, one to another, "he makes sport, in the face of danger; avenge our good name, Maeda, and let us make short work of the rest. Did you hear what he said? They 'have some farmers' arrows'—a pretty weapon to use against such as we! Spread the word, and we'll scale those walls before a soul of them has half finished sleeping."

Junkei therefore paid the penalty, without resistance; he had truly slept his sleep, for it was he and not Sanada who snored those daimyos to their doom.

Eighty thousand of their force rushed forward to scale the walls, and that blind ditch of Yodogima's provisioning emptied its waters to make room for the drowning invaders. Others rushed over these and against the embankment, where Sanada stood, his sleepless forces unscathed, to chop and slash them down. For hours they mired and fought, trapped and headless — but to no purpose; every stone's width in that wall had its defender, with another and still others within reach to take his place should chance or fatigue down and disable him. There was no shouting of orders; the word had gone round and around till every man of them knew by heart the rôle he should enact. Neither had a shot been fired; the guns lay loaded, and the powder unburned, behind still other walls of huger import and loftier building.

Practically one-third of Iyeyasu's strength — for those scared hirelings did fight, when cornered, quite as stubbornly as the liege master's aged samurai could have done — his most valiant commander, under Hidetada, Maeda, and nearly all of those doubtful daimyos — a few of them yet remained behind Ozaka, still in the semicircle — were either killed, routed, or scared into further uselessness. Nor was this all, for inside the fortifications a newer confidence sprang to the fore, impulse beat harder against the dictates of judgment, and but for Yodogima's influence alone they had

rushed one and all thirstily upon the waiting reserves.

"Calm yourselves, my friends," urged she, confident in their strength; "if you would follow one victory with another, then buckle your armor the closer. Madness means weakness, and you shall yet have enough to do before Hidetada is worsted; he will not expose his strength under cover of night; he has had better training. And there is Iyeyasu, behind him; an inverted pyramid, with both sides blocked by natural barriers. Mind what I say: Iyeyasu planned well, but his strategy is ancient; no doubt it served in the days of Confucius, but a new warfare has come; I command you: do not fire a gun, not a man of you, till you can count the teeth, each and everybody in his target's head."

They waited; no one would disobey, and only one so much as sold himself — Nanjo, a subordinate captain, for a miserly price ventured to carry Iyeyasu's fiery proposals to Sanada; who scorned the proffered estates, publishing everywhere the traitor's head as an example. Here, at last, Iyeyasu, the wise, had found exemplified the truth, to his betterment, that honor and not gold measures the content of highest living.

"I am doubtful about an open charge," cautioned he, of Hidetada, as the cover of night began breaking, yet far to the eastward.

"I am not," replied the younger man, more doubtful about covers, or chicanery, of any kind.

"Then you shall have to face them — I am ill."

"At ease, I trow; and if you think you can bribe a

Taira into retirement — see here, father; you should have tried first my wife; I think I know her breed; I am going to fight.”

The clouds rose, and the day opened glad, if not inspiring. Hidetada bestirred himself with the first lifting of night, and as the gray fogs banked over against the gorged-out mountains, with here and there a village or a temple hung defiantly or standing gracefully upon some jutting point or sloping greensward, those more sympathetic, if rawer, recruits, from the Tokugawa domain, took up the forward advance, and refacing the broken fragments of Maeda's demolished command now at first made that valley resound with the frenzy of rallying blood-tasted savagery.

Hidetada led them, and like with him the reward of valor had justified the risk. Stringing out his long formation into V shape, his right resting upon the solid Hirano, the left hard upon the seashore, and a solid oblong breaking and forming the V's middle, they tramped straight ahead, thus in zigzag alignment, toward a solid defense, from river to sea, behind the fortifications at Ozaka.

“They mean to break our walls midway, disregarding altogether the gates, then quarter about and march each half to the opening thus made,” said Yodogima, to Hideyori, her readiest counsellor. “I wonder what means they have to batter down barriers so thick and high — a hundred and twenty feet, I presume, just there.”

“Let them come,” replied the son. “And if they do

make the breach, I promise you that I and not they shall be the first to sally through; Harunaga's guns are trained, and he is going to count their teeth. Depend upon it.

Sanada lay close, under shelter of the low, temporary embankment: his ranks had been little impaired; Yodogima remained high up in the citadel — Hidetada advanced, to the wall where lay Sanada.

"What kind of hunting do you have out there? You might find it better on this side the wall," said Sanada, to Hidetada.

Hidetada made no answer, but began hopping his men over — the center first, and then others, as they came up — charging toward the outer main walls, as Yodogima had surmised.

Sanada fell back, coaxing them on.

"They had come well within range of Harunaga's matchlocks, the main body facing them squarely, when suddenly there rang out the unexpected:

"Fire!"

The enemy fell like rice heads underneath a sickle bar, and Sanada, wheeling, charged those reeling columns that Hidetada had marched to no better results than Maeda's.

CHAPTER XXXII

IYEYASU groaned under the weight of their defeat ; no one knew better than he the futility of matching defiance against gun-powder, and Jokoin had forewarned him, inadvertently let the secret out, yet the would-be builder of an intended autocracy dared not delay at all the execution of his plans. One that had of necessity materialized doggedly, now found him inconveniently approaching the end of any real assured activity, then awaiting better, as he knew only too well, the internal weakening of a democracy engrafted firmly, if insecurely, by Hideyoshi, in the face of him.

His own forces, the Tokugawas, upon whom he could rely, were inadequate to batter down the defenses round Ozaka, and Yodogima, with the Christians and their devices safely driven into her camp, required only the opportunity to win over a dissenting element ; who had already begun to smart, if not waver, under his very questionably assumed domination. These he had placed as well as he could in the teeth of danger, not only to save his own meager samurai, and Hidetada's raw recruits, together constituting the heart and the flower of the Tokugawa, but to weaken no less, if possible, the besieged. To do this, a midnight attack proffered an only hope — he must not disclose the fact, yet knew of his own knowledge that a daylight engagement meant disaster. Could

Harunaga have been inveigled into wasting his ammunition upon darkness, whatever the outcome of Maeda, and the daimyos, those scarred samurai of his, following up the fiery youth under Hidetada's command, had made quick work of all that should be left at the castle.

All these plans, so carefully laid, if inadvertently executed, had missed the outcome expected; the chagrined and defeated master at last lay exhausted and hopeless; he had threatened harakiri as a last resort; the bushida should not be violated; Hidetada alone consoled him; the fragments of his beaten youths were returning in handfuls; word came in, also, of Hideyori's marshaling his untouched reserves and that the reorganized and fired-up hosts of democracy might be expected to swoop down upon them at any moment.

"Prepare yourself, Hidetada; there is but one honor left us."

Withdrawing tearfully, the obedient son, an enforced husband and dearly-bought shogun, staggered to his own deserted quarters; only one remained to comfort him.

"What now, my lord?" inquired Esyo, gallantly, if concerned.

"Make ready, Esyo; all is done for, save —"

"What?"

"Harakiri."

"Not for me, my good husband."

"Do you deny me, also this consideration?"

“Yes.”

“Buddha! May there be one left, then, to avenge my good name.”

“There shall be — Sakuma, unhand this husband of mine, albeit he would dishonor not me; I shall have need for him here, in better grace, if not of reason.”

“Sakuma! Does the grave yield its own?” whispered Hidetada.

“You see him — perhaps a little aged, but in the flesh and blood. Keep a good watch, Sakuma, lest the shogun’s honor fail me his boots.”

Hidetada may not have liked the idea of being disarmed, or disillusioned, but the reasoning of his wife baffled him. Abstruse and as headstrong she had raised him from a secondary place in the family to that of shogun: the very consciousness of that advancement induced some consideration for if not confidence in her abilities, though the methods yet seemed as incomprehensible as the motive hitherto had been elusive. The shogun therefore suffered the disgrace; there was no denying Esyo, whether shamefaced or pleased.

Nor did she trust alone to promising; once his sword had been removed, the guard was doubled and instructed to let none pass — there might have been a true samurai among them, though everybody left appeared to be bent wholly upon saving his own neck.

Esyo hurriedly disguised herself, for no woman might safely attend unguarded the battlefield. She must see Iyeyasu, alone, and that quickly. His own

division steadfastly maintained its rigid formation, expecting as well to be called forthwith into action — Honda had intercepted Iyeyasu's threat at its threshold — but Hidetada's routed command continued bolting headlong in, bearing tales as disconcerting as untimely.

"Honda?" whispered she, approaching and beckoning from the outside.

"Yes, my lady," replied he, as nervously as anxiously

"Is he still alive?"

"Y-e-s — but desperate."

"Then let me in, and see that none else approaches."

"I'll do it," swore he, in confidence.

Iyeyasu sat with his face buried close in his hands. Why none had come to strike the stroke that should save his grace seemed more than he could solve.

"Honda," muttered he, at Esyo's approach. "Is there none here, meaner than Honda, to serve me, in this my last right? Shame upon them, ungrateful beggars!"

"Shame upon you, my lord," hissed Esyo, her blood fairly boiling, as she ran directly there. "What do you mean, by acting in this way?"

Iyeyasu looked up, amazed if relieved. He had mistaken her for Honda.

"Oh, it is you, is it? I thought you safe in Ozaka, no doubt before this."

"Well I might be, and you, too, were you not quite bent upon insulting others."

"I, insult anyone? And who might it be, pray."

"Among others, Yodogima, my sister."

"Yodogima!"

"Yes, Yodogima."

"Why so?"

"She just now sends a message, inquiring about your welfare."

"By whom?"

"Kyogoku."

"She loves me still, and I would kill myself? No, no; I must see her. Esyo; can you arrange it; I would first meet Yodogima?"

"Promise me this: you will keep the engagement."

"I swear it."

"Then lend me your sword; I shall have had need for it before I am returned."

Over at Ozaka, men bound and eager, to follow up a significant rout, were massing and ordering and devising the last and only onslaught that had been necessary to end a feudalism, throttle an aristocracy, and implant for good the democracy that Hideyoshi had all but consolidated.

Yodogima looked out and over the dazzling troop-ers, as they marched and countermarched to orders flowing from lips she adored as only a mother can. Hideyori, her son, had come into his own; should follow up that defeated army, and make doubly sure glories which were of right only his; would send his name down to all posterity, as the builder of a commonwealth founded upon an equality of opportunity

and with favoritism to none. Men and women should thenceforth develop the ideal that God infixes, share the real in due proportion, and worship according to the dictates each of his own untrammelled conscience.

“God bless you, my son; and may He give you strength to win,” said she, with no other thought encouraging, as their preparations progressed apace.

Then, as if fate intervened, she looked toward the South. The mother instinct had strangely given way, to that other force, man’s larger comprehension. Love itself had beamed inconsequently through those rays illuminating and searching had not a lesser respondent turned heavenward with glad countenance long before race or creed echoed the part and powers of an abiding God.

“Kyogoku?” commanded she. “Carry this, a message, to Iyeyasu. Then await, at yonder gate, his answer.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

YODOGIMA apparently faltered in the face of positive victory. Was it soul that stirred her to larger comprehension, or had God himself intervened to stay an absolute, a total, the fatal?

Jokoin came in from the field, aglow with expectation, fairly dawning and resolving at the prospect of Hideyori's famed, unquestioned gallantry. His furbelows shone out bewilderingly beautiful under the influence of a risen sun, and her light heart danced the more in consequence of its apparently disassociated illusionment—the food she really relished.

“It's a jolly fair day, this, Yodogima,” promised she, bounding in, without so much as a permission. “Have you seen the artillery? Oh, but it's an odd looking thing—a gun on wheels! I'm sure if Iyeyasu had had one like it he could have made some impression on these walls. I should like to have seen the fun—but, I suppose, it's lucky there was only one of them to be had; and luckier still that we've got it. We couldn't have made out at all without the Christians, and they're a bully lot, too; gold is no temptation to such people.”

“Perhaps,” remarked Yodogima, unconcernedly—

A shell burst near by, in the palace grounds. The impact deafened them.

"Horrors!" exclaimed Jokoin, nestling close under Yodogima's shelter.

"I am afraid there must have been two of them, after all," surmised Yodogima, attempting to calm the fears of Jokoin. "But it is too late now, to be firing at random into the castle. They had better save themselves the trouble. Oh, well; I shouldn't mind a little thing like that; Hideyori shall soon enough put an end to any further nonsense of the kind. Have courage, Jokoin."

"I pray they don't shoot again, this way."

Esyo had directed a return message in care of Jokoin, at the hands of Kyogoku; she understood this particular sister, suspicioned her true proclivities, and surmising that a well directed shot would startle her into the activities desired — should induce the younger to implore the elder sister — had, herself, unbeknown either to her husband or his father, brought into use an old mortar, a companion piece to the one boasted of Hideyori, purchased in consequence by Iyeyasu at great expense and stored away safely under cover of his compound, admirably, if not for service.

"I'll give them a taste in advance, of what is to come," threatened she, as the inexperienced gunners fell back in terror and she herself tripped forward to light the fuse.

The aim proved blunderingly good: though the citadel her intended target had been missed, a small addition to one of the minor buildings was in fact demolished and some two or three of the occupants — serv-

ing maids to Yodogima — were as observed at this either maimed or killed outright.

The explosion had its desired effect, and no amount of assurance or coaxing would or could allay the fears or quell the anxiety of concerned Jokoin. She must at once and at all hazards get Yodogima out of that demonical inferno — her own security quite overlooked — and when Kyogoku came in with the message supposedly from Iyeyasu, Yodogima, perhaps to quiet Jokoin, but more likely to carry out a deeper-laid plan of her own, readily yielded to her little sister's persuasion.

“YODOGIMA:

Meet me, at Kyogoku's residence, outside the castle; I must see you, and would ask no further guarantee than yours.

IYEYASU.”

It was all there was of the message — presumably an answer to the one she had sent — yet no greater influence than Jokoin's pleading were necessary to induce an immediate cessation of hostilities on Yodogima's part — insofar as a meeting with Iyeyasu was concerned.

Hideyori protested. For once his will rebelled against his mother's. The opportunity proffering overwhelmed every other consideration, and the young man proudly threatened to die behind those walls rather than let the enemy enter otherwise than as vanquished.

"Meet my mother, upon friendly terms? It is impossible!"

"But, my son, Iyeyasu out of the way the empire shall fall directly into your hands; there is none else to dispute you, and war is —"

"Hell — all of which Kitagira advised me long ago; but you see them anxious on all hands — just now, since that message was written, a shell has been fired into our midst. There is no end to fighting as long as men's blood runs red."

Yodogima paused; it had come to a parting with the one or the other. Blood and love are elemental within the human, but only for love there had been none to measure in the light of soul; heart and instinct might have gone on hand in hand, yet an Infinity's unvarying prudence saw fit to match understanding against the one; love is an affinity.

"Then accept my blessing," urged the mother, thoughtfully, after a while; "mine is run."

"And give you, as well, my protection; have no fear; go as you like; do what conscience bids, and the gods shall render you justice."

"Harunaga?" commanded he, directing his further conversation to him.

"Yes, my lord."

"Do not call me lord — not to-day; to-morrow you may, but if you would serve me now attend my mother; old men should yet be of some help, and if there are any others, of a like mind, behind these walls, let

them, too, depart; this is going to be a hot place, perchance worse, if I interpret Esyo's message correctly."

"Esyo!" gasped Jokoin.

"Yes; it is she; and, you are safe at Kyogoku's."

"I shall remain here," replied Jokoin, unobserved by Yodogima; whose interests had already settled upon one thought only.

These went their way, Yodogima accompanied by Kyogoku, to the latter's yashiki, a commodious dwelling, nestled away among the samurai huts fringing the castle grounds all round well under the outlying city's over-crowding borders. It was a slightly place and a safe one to which the honor-bound Kyogoku, a trusted intermediary, had led the proud, if anxious, princess, there to meet and do with life's final consummation. The very walls around seemed to echo some fain portent, in keeping with time's most cruelly adjudged, if seemingly ending.

Harunaga lay hidden in the fastness of an humbler shrine builded farther up on the hillside overlooking the walls and guarding eagerly each approach. No deed of the hand or foulness of a heart should harm or hinder his ladyship's grace as long as he might serve; he had divined well her secret, and marshalled afresh his own hardening courage: sought as best he knew to induce the moral which every man must finally know as in prudence wisely revealed.

She had gone there that Hideyori's hand might not be stained, that a nation should rise upon the hard-burned figments of ambition, that her love attain its

just reward, and an ideal come down from heaven to earth — a life's work rounded out in God.

Weighing over against his own feelings a greater force, the obligations that he had incurred, this gray-haired bonze, faith's most truly devoted, resolved in his own heart that she had chosen well, and that so long as he might prevent, her confidence should not be abused or Iyeyasu's word broken. Harunaga sat there, as he had lived, the sphinx, grinning against the gray and the dawn of duty.

Little birds twittered in the tree-tops, the frosts of winter threatened coming on, the shadows of evening were lengthening and casting their grim visages toward the treasured homestead she had left —

Two chairs, one bearing the three asarum leaves, the other an under man's crest, came tottering up the long, crooked, narrow, and overshadowed alley-way, the first ahead and the other after, their heads bobbing and poles creaking, to the patter of hurrying feet and bating of heated breaths. Harunaga, springing to his feet, edged closer to the wall, and peering hard through its miserly cracks muttered:

"It is well," and the two passed on, to their faintly induced, if death averting, task.

Dismounting and dismissing the carriers, the two entered, at one side the larger passage, through a small, low gate in the massive unscalable stone fence surrounding the house; leaving and abandoning thus any means of defence or escape, for the gate once closed could not be again opened without assistance.

Iyeyasu apparently bore no weapon at all, and Honda carried only the customary appendages allowable to a gentleman of his worth and rank. Harunaga, it would seem, had adjudged rightly, for he gave the matter no further concern.

Kyogoku met them at the inner entrance, in response to Iyeyasu's loud knocking upon the door-case.

"Welcome, my lord," vouched the former; whereat the latter responded:

"Thank you, but not as lord; I seek, am harmless, hence lordless. I trust I find myself still bidden and the princess in good parts. May I enter?"

The leaves upon the trees, standing here and there like sentinels, rustled gently in the day's abiding round, yet there arose out of its vigor as it were the meaning of a rebirth, the resurrection of man, the inspiration of soul—an ever-present God, whom the grind of time or the compensations of living alone reveal.

Conjure that God as we may, borrow if we can, proclaim Him from the house tops though we do, worship whom we will, there is no salvation till the eye has responded to conscience; and going there, as he did, had Iyeyasu but answered to the call that emanated betwixt duty and neglect? Had Yodogima found a haven that is neither of the real nor of the ideal? Had the circle that encompasses encountered its magnet?

The broad vistas opening to the eastward carried their gaze back over the same fields they had but

trodden: a Star illuminated the universe, and their hearts throbbed with the freshness of a regenerated past. No earthly thing could have parted them: might a heavenly grace have cemented more deeply the affection they two had wrought in the fiery cauldron of human endeavor? Iyeyasu bowed low in her presence, and she responded as no other living thing responds — the light of intelligence made certain the order intended.

Sitting there, in quiet contemplation, upon the floating bridge they trod, the future alone bursting jealously, they greeted each other; he, "How good to meet a lovely woman"; she, "How lovely to meet an honorable man": thence love ruled and blessings showered.

Out upon the field, in front, Hideyori thundered the cry of, "To battle," and Esyo marshaled, as well, the hosts against him. War reigned there.

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Yodogima in feudalistic Japan

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